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According to Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach (2003),
“understanding what the school needs and then delivering what is required is the core job of the principal” (p. 9). This research study seeks to tell the story of young female principals practicing in the twenty-first century. Autoethnography served as the primary qualitative approach utilized in the study, with additional focused interviews and document analysis with other young female principals serving as secondary data sources. Structural corroboration including data triangulation and methods triangulation contribute to the trustworthiness of the autoethnographic data. Presentation of findings is reported in a constructed narrative by weaving together data from all corroborated sources.

Harry Wolcott's 1973 study examining Ed Bell's work as a middle-aged, male principal served as the foundation for this conceptual framework, borrowing two specific categories from that book: (a) *A Day in the Life*, and (b) *The Annual Cycle of the Principals*. These categories are discussed in the current study, portraying the 2010 reality and drawing comparisons with Wolcott's (1973) descriptions. Key factors impacting the daily work of principals, including the context of the twenty-first century (i.e., educational law and policy, technology, and socio-cultural factors), and individual personal influences, are also presented in an attempt to better understand the daily work of these young, female school leaders. The intent of this study is to benefit educational leaders and preparation programs by providing an alternative lens of the various responsibilities that define the principalship.

THE WOMAN IN THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE: A STUDY OF YOUNG,
FEMALE PRINCIPALS PRACTICING IN
THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

by

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Approved by

Committee Chair

To Dad

“Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed
is more important than any one thing.”
—Abraham Lincoln

“If you treat every situation as a life-and-death matter, you’ll die a lot of times.”
—Dean Smith

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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School leaders are products of respectable schooling and life experiences. From Kindergarten, I have had relationships with teachers and principals that have helped shape my life. Support networks, both personal and professional, ultimately have the capacity to result in an improved sense of self. Without a doubt, my mom is the best teacher I have ever had. People joke that she has good intention and an invitation to talk stamped on her forehead. Since the age of four, I have tried to keep her from engaging in conversation with strangers at the grocery store. Indeed, I have had the good fortune of being strongly influenced by her life's work of good intent. Navigating the process of writing, becoming a good teacher, becoming a better principal, but, in the end, having the desire to become a good person, can certainly be attributed to my mom. My parents have given me the resources and confidence to pursue my goals, and my husband has graciously given me the time and circumstances to transform these goals into reality.

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Sherri Curtis, Sara Kesler, Tiffany Day, and Rhonda Wood are examples of the teachers and friends who keep the focus in the classroom exactly where it needs to be. The lens through which I see teachers has changed, although the respect I hold for them has only increased during my twenty-five years in public education, as student, teacher, and administrator.

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I owe much to the family members, friends, and teachers, who have contributed to my own lens as a person and school leader. I realize my fortune in enjoying my life both

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Change isn't emotion. It is real work and organization and strategy . . .
that's just the truth of it.

—Michelle Obama, First Lady of the United States

The Man in the Principal's Office, originally published in 1973, is a case study of an experienced, middle-aged male principal during the late 1960s (Wolcott, 1973). In his work, Wolcott takes an in-depth look at one principal, Ed Bell, and provides a rich description of the various aspects of his principalship experiences. Wolcott's ethnographic case study was considered a landmark example describing the work of principals in the United States. However, almost four decades have passed since Wolcott's work and our world is a very different place now than it was then. Schools, too, have changed in significant ways and one could assume that this has changed the nature of the principalship, as well as the work of principals. This dissertation is grounded in Wolcott's work and uses his case study as a foundation for telling a story of the contemporary principalship. Unlike Wolcott's late 1960s ethnographic case study which featured a middle-aged male principal, this story of the principalship is told from the perspective of five young female principals practicing in the early twenty-first century. As an unintended artifact of the selection process (explained in detail in Chapter III), the principals who participated in this study were all Caucasian and were all principals in elementary schools.

The Man in the Principal's Office is a foundational text in educational leadership that makes an important contribution to the literature on the principalship. The book offers a profound look at a middle-aged male's role as an elementary principal 40 years ago—a period of time when “fewer than 20% of elementary school principals were women, and less than 2% of high school principals were female” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 183). However, since that time the demographics of the principalship have changed and today there are far more female principals. For example, during the 2007-2008 school year, 59% of public elementary school principals and 29% of public secondary school principals were women (NCES, 2010). Many of the women assuming these roles are younger than middle age (Gieselmann, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1998, 1999). Such young female principals practicing in the twenty-first century are the focus of this research study.

Wolcott's work provides a relevant starting framework for data collection and analysis. This framework includes characteristics of the work of principals, influences on the work of principals, the principal as a person and the resulting impacts on daily work. Wolcott also gives much attention to the life of Ed Bell, the principal who is the subject of the study, outside of work, including his role as a church leader as well as some trying issues he encountered with his own son during the time the research was conducted. Interviews with Bell's wife and with his mother provided insight into his past, as well as to his current priorities. Furthermore, Wolcott explored some of Bell's interactions and experiences that were not necessarily part of Bell's work as a principal, but which influenced Bell's identity and values; therefore, influencing his work as a school leader.

The current study includes categories Wolcott used to organize the principal's work including, a day in the life of a principal and the annual cycle of the principalship. The research also examines the impact of context and individual personal experiences on the principalship. Some characteristics of the principalship have remained consistent since 1973, but other factors have changed significantly. Notable new influences include the impact of education law and policy, technology, and changing socio-cultural factors. In addition to changes in schools, research surrounding differences in the work of males versus females and the influence of age are significant factors that argue for conducting a research study that provides data similar to *The Man in the Principal's Office* but differs in terms of the time period in which it is conducted and the age and gender of the principal(s) being studied.

Call for Understanding

Changes in school environments, resulting from educational legislation and policy, technology advancements, and socio-cultural shifts, have transformed the principalship over the last several decades. This study seeks to provide a detailed description of the twenty-first century principal, using the lens of female principals under the age of forty. Although the principalship has changed over time for all principals, it is important to highlight the perspective from which this study originates, that of five young, female principals, since these factors may influence the way changes in educational legislation and policy, technology advancements, and socio-cultural shifts impacts the work of these principals.

Educational Legislation and Policy

Education legislation and policy has shifted the focus of principals' work from the time of Wolcott's study in 1973 to principals practicing in 2010. No other piece of legislation has impacted the work of principals as much as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush (NCLB, 2008). Since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, issues in education have become more public and more political. Paige (2006) writes that *A Nation at Risk* (1983)

convincingly argued that our nation was facing a grave situation that, left unchallenged, would not merely condemn millions of children to a life of poverty and struggle, but would fundamentally undermine the future well-being of our nation as a whole. (p. 464)

The significance of *A Nation at Risk* led to a state of panic in terms of finding ways to dramatically improve American education. In the report, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) stated, "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (p. 112). The sense of inadequate performance in comparison to other nations was also highlighted: "What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur--others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 112).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), provided guidelines for addressing some of the concerns raised in the 1983 report. NCLB also created a sense of urgency for principals to ensure student achievement. Policymakers closely monitor schools' abilities to reach state and national performance standards. "The No Child Left

Behind Act, and similar measures from states and cities, demands that educators be held accountable for student achievement at a school and classroom level” (Kafka, 2009, p. 328). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2008) shifted priorities in schools, creating legislated sanctions and the requirement that all students perform on their expected grade level by the year 2014. This legislative act requires schools to meet performance measures across subgroups including, “economically disadvantaged students, major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency” (NCLB, 2008). Providing a school setting that is culturally responsive with high academic expectations for all students has become non-negotiable for principals in the time of No Child Left Behind legislation (Andrews, 2006), which requires that all students perform at proficiency on standardized tests, regardless of race, socio-economic status, disability, or English language proficiency (NCLB, 2008).

Technological Advances

In addition to high-stakes testing, recent trends in technology have changed the work of principals by increasing levels of access, creating changes in response time etiquette, and forcing schools to examine alternate ways of teaching and learning (Dawson & Rakes, 2003). Whereas communication with parents, central office employees, and students has always been a responsibility of principals, email has monumentally increased the level of access these constituents have to principals (Kelehear, 2002). Response time expectations have also become more stringent as a result of using email as a primary mode of communication. Personal media devices such as BlackBerrys and iPhones, which result in email being literally at the fingertips of

principals, have made email a constant presence in principals' lives. School leaders often receive hundreds of emails in a day's time and are frequently expected to reply within a short time span. Student and staff access to technology also has changed the role of the principalship. Rather than traditional forms of learning, a push exists for schools to increase student access to technology in order to create globally competitive learners. Additionally, public school principals are competing with alternate forms of schooling such as online learning and Web 2.0 learning forums.

Socio-cultural Shifts

Socio-cultural changes have occurred in the past few decades and have impacted school climates and principals' roles. Based on U.S. census data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), schools are demographically more diverse than any previous time in history (Prewitt, 2002). While socioeconomic status, race/ethnic diversity, disability status, and English language proficiency are certainly not new factors impacting educational leaders, research surrounding how particular groups have historically been marginalized in school settings, and in society, has significant implications in twenty-first century school environments. Principals therefore have an increased responsibility to "respond to diversity and demonstrate multicultural leadership" (Johnson, 2007, p. 51).

School leaders are charged with establishing culturally responsive environments with relevant curricula that embraces all cultures and backgrounds, including those of students, families, communities, and staff (Crow, 2007). Culturally responsive principals engage in "practices that affirm students' home cultures, increase parent and community involvement in poor and culturally diverse neighborhoods, and advocate for change in the

larger society” (Johnson, 2007, p. 49). Principals also must ensure that cultural considerations extend to staff as well, both acknowledging the cultural backgrounds of staff members and ensuring that school staff demonstrate cultural competence when working with students and their families.

Additionally, acknowledging cultural factors related to principals, themselves, is also important when considering socio-cultural factors impacting school environments. For example, an extensive body of research exists, citing differences in men and women’s perspectives, reactions, experiences and interactions (Powell, Butterfield, & Bartol, 2008; Van Engen, Van Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001; Weyer, 2007). Similar to gender, the influence of age on the work of principals is also a significant variable (Barbuto, Fritz, Matkin, & Marx, 1997; Dunshea, 1998). Therefore gender and age differences are important to acknowledge when describing the work of principals. This study will specifically focus on young, white, middle-class, female principals.

Significance

The significance of this study is that a lack of richly-descriptive research exists that focuses on the work of contemporary principals, specifically on the work of young female school principals in the early years of the twenty-first century. Barbuto et al. (1997) write, “Studies of gender, age, and educational level as predictors of leadership style or leaders’ use of influence tactics are nearly absent from the research literature” (p. 73). The intent of this study is to benefit educational leaders and preparation programs by providing a richly-descriptive lens of the work of principals and, specifically, young

female principals. The study will portray real experiences of school principals in narrative form. Su and colleagues (2000) state:

in principal preparation programs, they would like to see a stronger connection between theory and practice, and that training should have more fieldwork and use schools as the bases for experiments and case studies (as cited in Rodriguez-Campos, Rincones-Gomez, & Shen, 2005, p. 311)

Principal preparation programs are primarily theory based and practical application is largely limited to internship experiences. A narrative account of the daily experiences of young, female principals provides a practical portrayal of the job itself and all that it entails.

Research Questions

This study will investigate the following research questions:

1. What is the work of a young, female principal like in the early part of the twenty-first century?
2. What influence does context (e.g., legal/political, technological, and socio-cultural factors) have on the work of young, female principals?
3. What influence do individual personal experiences have on the work of young, female principals?

Overview of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter II

Research surrounding the principalship exists in numerous capacities, including descriptions of the work told by principals themselves (Brubaker, 1995; Dunklee, 1999; Theoharis, 2007). However, accounts of the principalship are often isolated in focus,

typically describing one facet of the principalship or summarizing traits of effective school leaders. This chapter provides an overview of the literature, and explicitly describes the principalship as it is understood from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Additionally, current influences on the work of principals are highlighted to provide a context for the perspective that is distinctive to principals practicing in the twenty-first century. Influences on principals' work are depicted as this chapter reviews the literature on educational law and policy, technology, socio-cultural factors, and the influence of age and gender on the work of practicing principals.

Chapter III

The qualitative methodology used to conduct this study is presented in this chapter. The qualitative method of autoethnography is used, with the researcher serving as both participant and observer. External interviews were also conducted to provide trustworthiness for the autoethnographic data describing the principalship for young, female principals in the twenty-first century. These focused interviews, along with document analysis, corroborate the autoethnographic account of prevailing practices. In an attempt to provide a working understanding of the *whom* prior to the *what*, a brief explanation of participating principals and schools precedes the data analysis. Because the researcher is a participant in the data collection, this chapter concludes with acknowledgement of the researcher's subjectivity and attempts to increase trustworthiness of the results.

Chapter IV

Characteristics of principals' work are represented in Chapter IV. Using a composite fictitious principal named "Meredith," the work of the five principal participants in this study is combined to tell the story of "A Day in the Life" of a young female principal in the twenty-first century. The story follows Meredith through a chronological day by describing events from the time she wakes until the time she goes to sleep.

Chapter V

The "Annual Cycle of the Principalship" is described in Chapter V. Using a monthly account of a calendar year, a description of "Meredith's" annual cycle of her work is detailed. Chapters IV and V provide a detailed account of the principalship and depict the characteristics of the work of principals practicing in the early twenty-first century.

Chapter VI

Chapter VI revisits the conceptual framework and includes themes constructed during the data analysis process. Analysis of principals' descriptions of influences on their work is described. Educational policy and law, technology, socio-cultural factors, socio-cultural considerations, and individual personal experiences are analyzed in the context of findings. Themes identified during the data analysis process are discussed and include: The importance of self-presentation; The influence of a people-centered leadership style; The ability to multi-task life roles; The absence of intentionality in becoming a principal; The influence of external pressures; The influence of personal

schooling experiences; The influence of relationships; The influence of competitiveness as a motivating factor;

Chapter VII

The final chapter discusses findings related to the work of young female principals and describes the implications that can be extrapolated from the work. Study limitations and future avenues for research are offered. Alignment of findings and literature surrounding evolving school leadership is presented.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Things may come to those who wait, but only what's left behind by those that hustle.

-Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States

According to Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, and Gundlach (2003), “understanding what the school needs and then delivering what is required is the core job of the principal” (p. 9). The work of principals is an ever-changing task that requires abilities far beyond that which can be taught in theoretical coursework. This research study seeks to tell the story of young female principals practicing in the twenty-first century. Understanding historical and contemporary perspectives of the principalship leads to the study of key factors impacting the daily work of principals. Educational policy and law, technology, socio-cultural factors, and the implications of each are relevant in understanding the daily work of these young female school leaders. In a time when education is facing increasing public scrutiny and schools are being asked to do far more with far less, it is relevant to understand the work of those leading schools.

The Principalship

Over the last 100 years, the school principalship has shifted in terms of beliefs surrounding theory and practice. According to Brown (2005), “throughout the history of the modern American school, differences in political, social, and economic philosophies have had a major impact on the development and organization of education in general”

(p. 109). Historically, school principals were seen largely as disciplinarians and building managers. More recently, school principals have become increasingly responsible for knowledge of curriculum and instructional forms of leadership (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Little richly-descriptive current research exists that examines the principalship, especially from the perspective of a young female principal, during a time in which factors including educational policy and law, technology, and socio-cultural factors have created a sense of urgency that has, perhaps, initiated a transformation in the role of principal in comparison to past decades. Rousmaniere (2007) stated that although context and delegation of tasks influence the principalship, individual characteristics equally impact the position. In fact, my interest in this research topic surfaced after reading an ethnographic study, originally published in 1973, entitled *The Man in the Principal's Office* written by noted ethnographer, Harry Wolcott. The book is a study of a middle-aged male principal and describes the interactions, daily practices, formal encounters, informal encounters, and daily routines that frame his work as a principal in the mid-twentieth century within American society. Changes that have occurred during the last thirty years are significant and telling of how the principalship has evolved in conjunction with historical and contemporary events.

Priority Shifts of School Principals

Some aspects of the school principalship have remained largely the same over time (Kafka, 2009). The concept of schools as organizations, and principals as executive organization administrators, surfaces in historical accounts of the principalship.

Cubberley (1929)

applied tenets from the nascent field of administrative science to the management of schools (English, 2003) emphasizing the role of administrators as executives who engaged in such administrative functions as planning organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting (Gulick & Urwick, 1937), all with an eye toward enhancing the performance and efficiency of schools. (p. 94)

Principals, even in the 1920s, were responsible for maintaining a school building, managing staff, handling politics, uniting communities, and monitoring instruction (Kafka, 2009). However, recent mandates related to accountability have created additional responsibilities for principals who are now also responsible for tracking and improving student achievement (Nettles & Herrington, 2007).

Other historical changes in the principalship will help to inform the current study of young, female principals practicing in the early years of the twenty-first century. Looking at events that shaped the role in the past, will help gain understanding of the current influences on principals. Below is a summary of the principalship over the past 100 years in the United States.

History of the Principalship

In their discussion the characteristics of the principalship leading up to the 1920's, Beck and Murphy (1993) wrote that the “view of principals as leaders chiefly concerned with promoting traditional spiritual and civic values in schools and communities dominated the thinking” (p. 13). Clearly significant in acknowledging the continuum of beliefs surrounding school leadership was the difference in the impact of faith and spirituality. In the early 1900s, effective leaders exhibited “boyish vigor and trained expertise, muscular Christianity and entrepreneurial zeal—these merged easily in the age

of Theodore Roosevelt and in the dreams of success of the new generation of educational leaders” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 119).

During the first part of the 1900s,

the principalship gained professional recognition. In 1917, the First Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) was held, and in 1918, the Report of the National Education Association Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE) was issued. (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eager, 2005, p. 3)

During the late 1920s, “in addition to teaching, community relations were an important part of the job, as well as such mundane activities as going to the post office, inspecting toilets, typing, and winding clocks” (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 3).

The most significant shift from the 1920’s to the 1930’s was the movement away from spiritual leadership with a new focus on business principles. According to Malone and Frye (2003), spiritual leadership “incorporates vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival through calling and membership” (p. 2). Principals also began to serve the role of scientific manager, ultimately responsible for understanding the system of schooling and how it worked. Kafka (2009) notes, “the principalship became an increasingly prestigious position distinct from that of teaching as the role became increasingly defined as White and male” (p. 326).

Beck and Murphy (1993) argued that the 1930’s views of the principalship considered the principalship to be primarily administrative and a profession separate from teaching with the “conception of schooling as a business and of the principal as an executive” (p. 23). Although principals’ roles as community leaders were evident in

literature from the 1930's, views of principals as social, spiritual, and dignified leaders significantly lessened during this time.

During the Great Depression, “the elementary-school population was declining, schools were closing, taxes were drying up, teachers were being fired, programs were being abolished, and Americans were questioning not only the value of education but the whole fabric of traditional beliefs” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 258). Many leaders saw the Depression as a time for “reformulation of the basic meanings of public education” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 258). “The Great Depression of the 1930s reinforced the goal of individual development and the need for caring for the whole child, and schools made efforts to provide hot lunches, medical examinations and clothing” (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 3). Additionally, during the Great Depression, “principals worked in the evenings to add classes for adults,” (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 3).

Because of new realities that surfaced as a result of World War II, the principalship during the 1940's contained a new language focusing on democratic leadership. According to Beck and Murphy (1993), principals in the 1940's were viewed as leaders “on the home front,” expected to “demonstrate democratic leadership so that students and teachers (could) lead peaceful and productive lives.” Additional duties included “curriculum developer, group leader and coordinator, and supervisor.” Similar to prior decades, the principal during the 1940's was also viewed as the school's “public relations representative within the community” (p. 32). “American” and “social” appeared frequently in the literature when describing the principalship during the 1940's. Faith in humanity's ability to solve problems, commitment to equality, and a strong belief

in democracy stood as moral values during this decade. The forties held an almost cyclical shift for the principalship, with the literature on the principalship arguing that principals should hold values and beliefs as top leadership priorities. However, World War II changed these values from spirituality and religion, to values of democracy and equality.

The concept of equality provided somewhat of a foreshadowing as to what the 1950's held for public education. Indeed, a great deal of change took place during the 1950's in the field of educational administration. For the first time in history, a strong and undeniable link existed between public schools and the cultural influences of American society. External factors, including global competition significantly impacted the principalship during the 1950s. Brown (2005) wrote:

The Cold War, the launch of Sputnik during the late 1950s, and the social and political turbulence of the 1960s created a new focus for formal education. While school officials concentrated on academic excellence, particularly in mathematics and science, principals drew on empirically developed strategies for management and organization, working hard to maintain stability and a sense of normalcy. (p. 125)

Excellence in instructional techniques, specifically around math and science, became a significant concern of principals during the 1950's.

In 1954, the Supreme Court handed down the landmark decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, "in which the Court ordered the end of state-mandated racial segregation of public schools" (Bell, 1980, p. 518). Following the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, principals during this decade were faced with managing the integration of schools. *Brown vs. Board of Education* "was the repudiation of both the Supreme Court's

Dred Scott decision (1857), which said that Black people had no rights that Whites were bound to respect, and also the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision (1896) that established the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’” (Malveaux, 2004, p. 39).

Principals were also responsible for encouraging excellence in math and science and maintaining day-to-day details of school operations. These new roles were in addition to those other leadership roles previously established (e.g., instructional coach, community liaison, democratic leader). Tensions between theory and practice peaked during this time in the middle of the century as a result of the need for principals to act in a “highly supportive and democratic fashion” while leading “a team of faculty members toward excellence in teaching” (Beck & Murphy, 1993, p. 73).

As a result of organizational science, largely stemming from World War II, schools became viewed as bureaucracies, and principals were seen as leaders of these bureaucracies during the 1960’s. “Reformers of the 1960s—cheerfully ignoring history—promised quick pedagogical fixes to old and intractable problems. Much of the public skepticism about schools and a desire for a return to the three Rs result from overpromising in the last generation” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 252). However, an urgent need to surpass increasingly competitive countries pushed for additional focus on math and science. “NDEA funds for mathematics, science, and foreign language were used to buy equipment and to train teachers, and principals in 1959-1960 were involved in the expenditure of those funds” (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 5).

“The civil rights movement and other protest movements of the 1960s became powerful forces in public education, and both schools and society reached a point that led

to conflict and change,” resulting in the 1950s and early 1960s “as a time of growth and change in the modern principalship” (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 5). Although many humanitarian issues were present during this time, including desegregation, poverty, and social inequity, educational administration moved away from discussions of these realities and instead chose to focus heavily on concrete organizational methods. Feelings and personal values were absent from school leadership literature during the 1960’s. On the contrary, a large portion of the writings from this time seem to remove the human element from school leadership altogether. Beck and Murphy (1993) concluded that “most principals during this time clung to the belief that schools were rational hierarchies and that their various relationships should be consistent with this assumption” (p. 106).

While the sixties in principalship literature were characterized by largely impersonal beliefs, the 1970’s, on the contrary, promoted very humanistic priorities for principals. “Between 1966 and 1974, in the era of Vietnam and Watergate, confidence in leaders dropped sharply in almost every domain” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 259). Priorities of school leaders during the 1970’s included becoming integral members of their communities, acting as civil leaders, while relating well to all members of the educational environment.

More than ever before in history, principals during this decade were responsible for bringing the community into the school and bringing meaning to education, itself. Schools were once again viewed as centers of their communities, and educational administrators were expected to plan joint activities for community residents and school personnel while exploring alliances and common areas of concern. Principals, as

community leaders, were certainly prioritized during this decade. As opposed to the 1960's, during which time principals were expected to focus primarily on the organization itself, the 1970's held the belief that building and fostering relationships inside and outside of the school building was necessary for the success of school leaders. These beliefs mirror the historically relevant events of the time, moving away from racial inequities and civilly unjust behaviors that were largely ignored by schools towards a "self-actualization and the creation of emotionally supportive schools" (Beck & Murphy, 1993, p. 133).

Similar to Beck and Murphy's description of principals participating in community outreach during the 1970's, Wolcott (1973) described the same scenarios when studying the work of Ed Bell. During his evaluation with the superintendent in the 1960's, Ed was asked about his ability to connect with the community and to increase community participation in decisions made at the school level. Political and interpersonal skills were priorities during the 1970's when principals were expected to reach out into the community. However, the 1980's was the first decade when community members began to reach back into the schools.

Factors related to rights of students and teachers, as well as societal trends, also shifted the focus of principals in the 1970's. "The 1970s were a time when the principal needed a strong legal understanding as he dealt with new issues of student rights and due process, sexism, and mainstreaming disabled children" (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 6).

Lowering the age of majority from 21 to 18 meant that legal adults were in a school planned for minors. Principals were confronted with crises of teen pregnancy, youthful drug abuse, alcoholism, and decreasing attendance, and were

expected to provide leadership in solving these non-academic, community problems. (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 6)

Communities became keenly aware of school issues in the 1980's and began taking an active stance to guide educational processes. Answering to the community, as opposed to gaining community interest in the school, provided new challenges for principals during the 1980's (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Johnson, 2007). This new sense of accountability called for principals to link school-based decisions to student outcomes. Similar to leadership responsibilities in the early 1800's, principals in the 1980's were asked to place heavy emphasis on instructional leadership. Whereas recent decades held the roles of organizational and political leadership in high esteem, literature from the 1980's suggests that instructional leadership was the key priority of principals (Beck & Murphy, 1993). In addition to having a presence in classrooms in order to effectively lead schools and impact teaching and learning, principals during this decade were also expected to act as effective change agents. Principals who could implement change effectively in order to increase student achievement were considered successful leaders. A Gallup Poll conducted in 1980 seeking to determine how much confidence Americans had in institutions to serve the public's need, "public schools came in second, after the church, but ahead (in descending order) of the courts, local government, state government, national government, labor unions, and big business" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 259).

Educational administration during the 1980's also called for principals to be visionaries, leading their schools toward an ideal and helping teachers believe that

principals' visions of an ideal school could become a reality. Holding high expectations for student performance and providing conditions under which these expectations could be attained was the responsibility of the visionary, instructional school leader of the 1980's. Beck and Murphy (1993) wrote of dominant values that emerged from the educational literature of the eighties, including high levels of emphasis on accountability. Accountability in the 1980's carried a different sentiment than current definitions of accountability in educational leadership. During the eighties, accountability was "predicated on the belief that principals are accountable for educational efforts and that their effectiveness or ineffectiveness can, to a large extent, be objectively determined" (p. 165).

Reforms initiated in the 1980s "driven by fiscal crises gave rise to strong influences from business and industry and to the expectation that the schools' function was to promote the economy" (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 6). The late 1980s

emphasized the involvement, not only of teachers, but of parents, students, and community members in site-based management. The increase of local participation in governance and involvement in the decision-making process gave rise to the expectation that 'principals become facilitators who help others Identify and solve problems collaboratively. (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 7)

The term contemporary for purposes of the historical account covered the span of time from the 1990s to the 2000s. "The contemporary principal faces increased expectations for school improvement, demanding social pressures, and conflict between the roles of instructional leader, organizational leader, community leader, and strategic leader" (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 7). "Given the concerns about stress and time, the reported role

conflicts, and the shortages in applicants for the principalship, one might infer that these concerns may be unintended consequences of changes in the principalship” (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 8). As reported by Brubaker (1995),

Different leadership styles began to appear in the ‘70s, and superintendents and principals were forced to deal with them in the ‘80s and ‘90s. Legislation, professional organizations, and the media demanded that the public have more access to information. With this came accountability measures that often led to the end of good ol’ boy administration. (p. 88)

Accountability played an increasing role in guiding the principalship during the 1980’s; however, the ability of school leaders to directly impact student achievement would not become the primary focus of accountability until the 1990’s. This primary focus is one of the main influences on contemporary perspectives of the principalship. “Principals reported in 1990 that state reform policies had expanded their roles and bureaucratic responsibilities, but had not expanded their budgets” (Goodwin et al., 2005, p. 7). “When asked what percentage of their job is political, superintendents and principals who wrote autobiographies in the ‘90s said, ‘Over 90 percent’” (Brubaker, 1995, p. 88). Since the 1990’s, the focus on high stakes testing and linking the work of principals to student achievement has changed the face of the principalship itself. While the principalship is, in fact, cyclical in some forms, including organizational efforts and principal evaluation methods, the work of principals in the twenty-first century is unlike the work of principals during any other time in history.

Contemporary Perspective of the Principalship

Many duties that encompass the work of school leaders have remained the same over time. Indeed, as Kafka (2009) informs,

Works by Hallinger, Beck and Murphy, and others are helpful in demonstrating that principals have always been expected to be instructional leaders, even as the language and buzzwords surrounding instructional tasks have changed, and that their roles have always represented a mixture of expectations and competing demands. (p. 326)

The principalship has, in fact, always required the ability to multi-task and prioritize a wide range of expectations. Which expectations and priorities must be managed is typically what has changed over time.

Current research cites several notable differences in the principalship in the twenty-first century, including the link between effective school leaders and student achievement. West, Peck, and Reitzug (2009) write, “public accountability systems have created significant new pressures for principals, who are often the only individual whose name is directly linked to a school’s academic performance” (p. 19). Areas of focus for today’s principals largely include community engagement and instructional leadership with a concentration on linking practices to student achievement. In a comprehensive attempt to define “what school leaders actually do,” Portin et al. (2003) conducted a national study of the principalship, funded by the Wallace Foundation, entitled “Making Sense of Leading Schools.” Findings from the 2003 study included six major conclusions surrounding the contemporary work of principals:

1. The core of the principal's job is diagnosing his or her particular school's needs and, given the resources and talents available, deciding how to meet them.
2. Regardless of school type—elementary or secondary or public or private—schools need leadership in seven critical areas: instructional, cultural, managerial, human resources, strategic, external development, and micropolitical.
3. Principals are responsible for ensuring that leadership happens in all seven critical areas, but they do not have to provide it.
4. Principals can be 'one-man-bands, leaders of jazz combos, or orchestra conductors.'
5. Governance matters, and a school's governance structure affects the way key leadership functions are performed.
6. Principals learn by doing. However trained, most principals think they learned the skills they need 'on the job.' (Portin et al., 2003, p. 1)

In diagnosing school needs, "to be effective, school leaders must read and understand their school and community culture. Reading culture takes several forms: watching, sensing, listening, interpreting, using all of one's senses, and even employing intuition when necessary" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 203). The critical areas listed by the Wallace Foundation study define the wide range of responsibilities of the contemporary principal, including the ability to allocate resources, provide cultural leadership, and effectively distribute leadership responsibilities. Eight major symbolic roles of the contemporary principal are described by Deal and Peterson's (1999) *Shaping a School Culture: The Roles of School Leaders*:

Historian: seeks to understand the social and normative past of the school
 Anthropological sleuth: analyzes and probes for the current set of norms, values, and beliefs that define the current culture
 Visionary: works with other leaders and the community to define a deeply value-focused picture of the future for the school; has a constantly evolving vision
 Symbol: affirms values through dress, behavior, attention, routines
 Potter: shapes and is shaped by the school's heroes, rituals, traditions, ceremonies, symbols; brings in staff who share core values

Poet: uses language to reinforce values and sustains the school's best image of itself

Actor: improvises in the school's inevitable dramas, comedies, and tragedies

Healer: oversees transitions and change in the life of the school; heals the wounds of conflict and loss. (p. 204)

Each contemporary portrayal of principals' work references the need to serve multiple interests simultaneously while keeping the best interest of students served and a purposeful vision at the forefront of all decisions.

Managing varying interests in a time when public education is being asked to do more in terms of performance with rapidly dwindling resources is a daunting task. As Goodwin et al. (2005) report,

Principals are faced with administering batteries of annual tests, assisting struggling sub-groups of children to meet artificial goals, dealing with more rigid hiring procedures, considering scientifically based research that provides valid curricular information, and encouraging parents to become more involved in their children's education. (p. 8)

Given the historical background of the principalship, it appears that the role of principal is cyclical in nature in terms of the shifts in focusing on instructional leadership and community engagement rather than building management and organizational capacity. However, while some aspects of the work and priorities of principals have remained the same, external factors including context (e.g., educational policies and laws, technology, and socio-cultural factors) and individual personal influences on principals have had direct impacts on the way schools operate and have changed the nature of the principalship itself. Understanding the work of principals requires acknowledging these factors and the manner in which they impact the principalship in the twenty-first century.

Educational Policy and Law

From 1973 to 2010, a great deal changed in terms of how educational policy and law impacted the principalship, including new laws about who has a right to access an equitable public education and how to measure the quality of public education. Hope and Pigford (2001) inform, “In 1999 alone, more than 2000 bills related to education were introduced during the first months of the legislative session” (p. 44). Indeed, principals are charged with understanding and implementing local, state, and federal policies in addition to adhering to school law while performing everyday managerial and instructional tasks. In the sections that follow, new education laws, policies, and legal cases that have significantly impacted the work of schools and principals since 1973 are discussed.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Educational policies and laws in the field of special education have changed schools significantly since the 1970s. Prior to special education legislation, students in need of specialized services were often isolated to separate settings and did not have the same educational opportunities as their peers without disabilities (McCarthy & Deignan, 1982). As a result of IDEA and other special education legislation, districts, principals, and teachers are responsible for ensuring an appropriate education for all students, due process, Individualized Education Plans, and numerous additional components for all students to have equitable access to educational opportunities. There is a responsibility at the school level for addressing special education requirements and the implications for practicing principals (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997).

Perhaps the most commonly referenced special education legislation is PL 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally passed in 1990. IDEA shifted the terms associated with individuals with disabilities from “handicapped” to “disabled.” In addition, IDEA added autism and traumatic brain injury as special education categories and required a transition plan for 16-year-olds with disabilities. In 1997, amendments were made to IDEA under PL 105-17. These amendments required the parent and general education teacher to participate in the development of IEPs for students with disabilities. Participation of special education students in state and district-wide assessments, optional testing for re-evaluations, and discipline specifications were also outlined by the IDEA amendments.

In order to provide the least restrictive environment for special education students, many schools implement a form of inclusion, in which special education students are mainstreamed into the regular education setting to the fullest extent possible. A great deal of legislation regarding appropriate placement and the responsibility of providing the least restrictive environment, as stated in IDEA, exists. Conrad and Whitaker (1997) write, in *P.A.R.C. v. Pennsylvania* (1971), “the court stated that ‘among alternative programs of education and training required by the statute to be available, placement in the regular public school class is preferable to placement in a special public school class’” (p. 207). Numerous additional court cases have been heard regarding the responsibility of the school to provide the least restrictive environment for special education students: *Roncker v. Walter* (1983), *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education* (1989), *Oberti v. Board of Education* (1992), *Greer v. Rome City School District* (1992),

Sacramento City Unified School District v. Rachel H. (1994), *Mavis v. Sobol* (1994), and *Clyde K. v. Puyallup School District* (1994) (Conrad & Whitaker, 1997).

In addition to least restrictive environment, principals must also ensure that laws are followed regarding the discipline of students with disabilities. Under IDEA, if a suspension of a student with disabilities exceeds the 10-day limit,

it becomes a change of placement, and if school officials do not follow the IDEA's change-of-placement procedures (e.g., written notice to the student's parents, convening the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, conducting a manifestation determination), the suspension is a violation of the law. (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p. 12)

Other legislation related to disciplining special education students requires that educational services continue if a student receives long-term suspension or expulsion. Additionally, if a student receives a cumulative of 10 days of suspension, requirements by law include revisiting the IEP, conducting a functional behavioral assessment, and developing a behavior intervention plan. Also, "the team must hold a manifestation determination to determine if a student's misbehavior was caused by or had a direct and substantial relation to his or her disability" (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p. 12).

Special education legislation holds major implications for the daily work of school principals. Since the 1970s, legislation has required high levels of parental involvement, specifications for IEPs, and rules for disciplining students with disabilities. Tissington (2006) writes, "Appropriate instruction, necessary adaptations, and modifications of curriculum are rights guaranteed to all students and mandated for students with disabilities" (p. 20). Ensuring appropriate instruction and modifications for

students with disabilities while maintaining a least restrictive environment, compliant paperwork, and other forms of required documentation for special education students while evaluating special education procedures at the school level are responsibilities of building level administrators with significant legal implications.

Brown v. Board of Education

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was a landmark case that resulted in initial desegregation of schools, although actual desegregation took decades longer to actually accomplish and numerous inequities are still evident in schools more than sixty years after the fact (Chemerinsky, 2003). Job loss and school closings were consequences of the *Brown* decision that had significant implications for African American principals in the decades following the case.

Because African American principals were “role models and community leaders, their removal from the educational landscape . . . affected not only these leaders as individuals but also the children and communities they served” (Karpinski, 2006, p. 239). The immediate impact of *Brown* on African American principals and teachers was monumental. From 1954-1965, Tillman (2004) reports, “more than 38,000 Black educators in 17 southern and border states were dismissed from their positions” (p. 286).

Perhaps even more significant than the impact on educators alone was the impact of *Brown* on the Black community. Tillman (2004) writes, “the wholesale firing of Black educators threatened the economic, social, and cultural structure of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children” (p. 280).

With the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision came a great deal of challenges for schools and school leaders. Redistricting and establishing equality in terms of buildings and teachers, while navigating challenges of the ruling and providing a safe, orderly learning environment for all students was a large undertaking for school principals during the years following.

Economic Opportunity Act

The Civil Rights Act was passed forty years ago, as was the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA). According to Malveaux (2004),

These laws were, in some ways, as revolutionary as *Brown*, with the EOA representing the central thrust of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society legislation and his War on Poverty. A plethora of programs were established under the EOA, including Head Start, Summer Youth Programs, Neighborhood Legal Services, Foster Grandparents, Senior Centers, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) programs, the Job Corps, economic development programs, and other programs. (p. 39)

The EOA had significant meaning for the work of principals. More than ever, caring for the whole child and leading schools in an effort to collaborate with the community was required for school leaders. Public education, for the first time, surpassed K-12 education and sought to become inclusive of pre-school students through economic development for adult learners. Schools became the center of communities, and federal funding and policy redefined schools as units to fight poverty through a wide range of programs.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) Policies

In addition to program funding for Civil Rights, additional policies were developed acknowledging the need to level the playing field for minority students in

education. Funding was originally dispersed to programming for non-English speaking students through Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as the Bilingual Education Act, which provided “funds to districts to create and supplement the operation of programs to meet the needs of LEP children” (Baker & Markham, 2002, p. 659). Baker and Markham (2002) also found,

The rights of LEP (Limited English Proficient) students were clarified in 1974 when Congress adopted the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA), which stated that ‘no state shall deny equal opportunity to an individual on an account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by . . . the failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs.’ (p. 659)

A direct reflection of changing societal demographics, policies and funding for LEP students required schools to assess and provide equitable opportunities for non-English speaking students. Implications for principals included scheduling to inclusively meet the needs of these students, ensuring home-school communication in each student’s native language, and perhaps most notably, implementing instructional strategies that aligned with student needs and resulted in academic achievement for LEP students.

Student Discipline Case Law

In recent years, educators have been faced with the challenge of maintaining safe and orderly learning environments while complying with legislation and litigation related to student rights in handling discipline matters in the public education setting. According to Yell and Rozalski (2008), “students have two primary areas of legal rights: (a) students’ right to privacy and freedom from unreasonable searches and (b) students’ right to due process” (p. 8). Essentially, as proven in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent*

Community School (1969), students maintain Constitutional rights while they are at school; however, school authorities have the right to exert reasonable control in order to maintain a safe school environment.

Numerous court cases have been heard related to student rights and disciplinary procedures. In the spirit of ensuring due process and the right of students to appeal and share their sides of a story, *Goss v. Lopez* (1975) and *Wood v. Strickland* (1975) found “all students have rights in disciplinary matters based on the due process clauses of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution” (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p. 8). Furthermore, *New Jersey v. T.L.O.* (1985), a case focusing on the topic of searching student property, also relates to student discipline. After appeals at the Supreme Court level, this case “granted a great deal of latitude to schools but developed a two part test for determining whether a school search is valid.” In order for school personnel to search a student, “the search must be justified at inception ... there must be reasonable grounds to lead school authorities to believe that a search is necessary,” and “the reason for conducting the search must be related to the violation of the law or the school rules” (Yell & Rozalski, 2008, p. 8).

Legislation related to student discipline holds significant implications for school principals. In addition to ensuring due process and a clear understanding of how and when to appropriately search student property, principals must set forth clear rules that are understood by all members of the school community. Yell and Rozalski (2008) write, “When a school district is sued over a particular disciplinary incident, the court will often examine the school’s rules and consequences to determine whether administrators were

fair and reasonable” (p. 14). Unlike Wolcott’s work in 1973, when principals were primarily building managers and laws and policies did not play a large role in the daily work of principals, principals in the twenty-first century have a responsibility to have a working understanding of legislation and policy and to implement these rules effectively with staff members, students, and parents.

No Child Left Behind Act

Steeves, Bernhardt, Burnes, and Lombard (2009) write, “Much as the Sputnik ‘crisis’ proved the catalyst for federal action on education policies that had been discussed for a decade, so *A Nation at Risk* responded to the economic competitiveness crisis of the 1970s and early 1980s” (p. 82). Indeed, educators in the twenty-first century have seen a great deal of policies related to the rescue of American education including thousands of policies related to reform. Understanding these policies and implementation at the school level is up to principals. Indeed, as Hope and Pigford (2001) write, “While educational policy is based on the reality of legislators, implementation of policy is dependent on the realities of educators” (p. 44). In recent years, the most notable policy impacting schools is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2008). “NCLB, as most educators know, is the current incarnation of the ESEA of 1965, a landmark federal statute that, for the first time, lobbed substantial federal tax dollars into the nation’s public schools” (Popham, 2009, p. 577).

When examining legislation that has recently impacted education, NCLB far surpasses any other policies in recent history in terms of its impact on current educational practices. Whether because of the supposed bipartisan support or the negatively

publicized lack of funding to support the act, there is little doubt that NCLB is the most significant legislation to impact schooling since President Bush signed the bill on January 8, 2002 (Paige, 2006). The degree to which NCLB has changed public education as we know it requires looking specifically at its definition and components, as well as its positive and negative implications for schools.

NCLB components. One key component of NCLB is the requirement for states to establish proficiency standards in reading, math, and science. In order to establish whether students are proficient, states are also required to develop assessments to determine whether students are meeting these standards. Borkowski and Sneed (2006) state, “under NCLB, a successful school or school district, by definition, is one that ensures that students from different backgrounds are making progress” (p. 507). NCLB is not the first example of the federal government noting the need for schools to be held accountable for student performance. Prioritizing high standards in education spurred from the launch of Sputnik, which placed a sense of urgency on the United States to increase its focus on education in order to remain competitive in the top cusp of globally competitive countries in the fields of math and science. Paige (2006) writes,

with the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), Congress pronounced that educational deficiencies, especially in the areas of mathematics, science, and modern foreign languages, were a critical reason the United States was falling behind the Soviet Union. (p. 463)

NDEA provided funding for high school students in hopes that growing and retaining national scholars would keep the United States at the forefront of new academic initiatives. While NDEA and NCLB are both national efforts to improve public education

by ensuring progress, NCLB carries a set of punitive outcomes for schools that do not reach desired standards.

Under Title I of NCLB, additional funding is provided to schools that have more than 40% of students qualifying as economically disadvantaged. According to Weckstein (2003), Title I's "annual \$11.7 billion mostly assists schools to plan, implement, and improve their core academic programs to deliver on the promise of quality education for their students and enable them to meet those standards" (p. 123). Weckstein (2003) states schools receiving Title I funding must develop a plan (with a committee representative of school personnel and parents) that includes how the school will provide each of the following:

- An enriched and accelerated curriculum;
- Effective instructional strategies and methods, including strategies for meeting the educational needs of historically underserved populations;
- Highly qualified teachers, who participate in intensive, high-quality staff development to improve their teaching skills;
- Strategies (e.g., counseling) for addressing the needs of all children in the school, particularly the needs of low-achieving children and those at risk of not meeting the state standards, who are members of the target population of any program included in the school-wide program, along with methods for determining whether those educational needs have been met; and
- Timely and effective additional assistance to individual students having difficulty mastering any of the standards, including methods for identifying students' difficulties on a timely basis and providing sufficient information on which to base effective assistance. (p. 123)

At the school level, increased focus on accountability and the need for students to perform well on state achievement measures have become the priorities of students, parents, teachers and administrators as a result of NCLB (Simpson, LaCava, & Granar, 2004). The act includes the standard that all schools are to make adequate yearly progress

(AYP) in order to reach 100% proficiency by the 2013-2014 school year. Regardless of stance in support of or in opposition to NCLB, this act has undeniably impacted schooling over the course of the last eight years (Simpson et al., 2004).

Benefits of NCLB. Perhaps the most positive repercussions from NCLB include the acknowledgement that schools must provide opportunities for all students to learn. In addition, the public reporting component has established a new sense of accountability for superintendents, principals, and teachers. While the nuts and bolts of data and how it can be potentially skewed is a great source of debate, there is little doubt that holding schools accountable is a good practice that ultimately benefits students and parents. Borkowski and Sneed (2006) write that “educators, parents, and students should receive periodic assessments of how students are progressing toward the attainment of high academic standards” (p. 504). Requiring schools to frequently share student progress as it relates to the grade level standard is a form of transparency that parents should have been entitled to long before the implementation of NCLB. In addition to ongoing reports of student achievement, the type of reporting required by NCLB is much more inclusive. When discussing reports required by NCLB, Borkowski and Sneed (2006) state:

NCLB has required public reporting of the results of such achievement tests, not only in the aggregate, but also disaggregated by race, ethnic diversity, socioeconomic status, disability, and English language learner status. Such disaggregation is critical to any effort to ensure that our nation’s public schools are serving all groups of students, regardless of their background characteristics or special needs. (p. 504)

Prior to NCLB, local policymakers held the right to share only those reports of student achievement that they selected. However, NCLB specifically states the types of reports

that states are required to share with the public thus creating a more transparent form of accountability that is required for all 50 states.

The debate regarding NCLB has not changed a great deal since it was agreed upon by both parties in 2001 as educators and policymakers are still arguing whether the federal government should have such a strong impact in the field of education which has historically been handled strictly by individual states. Paige (2006) writes, “regardless of the criticism, states and local school districts retain paramount authority not just over the implementation of the law, but over most education policy and practices as well” (p. 468-469). Shift of power from state boards to the federal government is an underlying theme that resurfaces in nearly every debate surrounding NCLB.

Supporters of NCLB often reference the benefits of the act for marginalized student populations. The act cites specific protocol for raising standards for English language learners, students who qualify for special education, and minority students. The act requires high academic standard for all students by requiring measurable progress. Indeed, “NCLB serves as a safeguard to prevent these (special needs) students from being relegated to an educational lifetime of unnecessarily lowered academic expectations” (Paige, 2006, p. 469). Many policymakers and parents appreciate the requirement of these regulations while a large percentage of educators question whether standards set forth by the act are realistic.

Negative outcomes of NCLB. Through the course of history, public education has been left to individual states to establish methods for instructional practices, accountability, and management of financial resources (Fusarelli, 2004). The state versus

federal control of public education argument also results in unclear outcomes of NCLB. The act itself mandates progress at the national level but defining and measuring this progress is left to individual states. Borkowski and Sneed (2006) identify these compromising standards, “Because NCLB allows each state to define proficiency individually, the act’s substantive goals have no common meaning” (p. 513). With NCLB, states are struggling to meet federal mandates that are universal with 50 separate sets of curricula, tests, ramifications for poor performance, and strategies for improvement. When examining shortfalls of NCLB, it is important to note that there are not clear interventions that are left up to the state. The implications for failure are the only universal component of the law, leaving skeptics to wonder if this is simply a waiting game for the failure of public education as a whole.

According to Chapman (2007), “NCLB funds represent only about 7 to 13 percent of state education budgets” (p. 36), leaving many to question what resources schools are supposed to use in order to reach the significantly high academic standards set forth by NCLB. School leaders are being asked to produce better results with fewer resources than they have had in recent years due to budget cuts at the state and local levels (Kafka, 2009). The shortfalls related to money for schools are key when describing negative associations of NCLB and the current state of education. Borkowski and Sneed (2006) claim, “Just as NCLB has not provided the accountability for which it ostensibly was designed, it also has not resulted in significantly increased funding for public education” (p. 513). In a period of economic decline, schools are being asked to do more with less,

often casting blame on the underfunded and therefore unfulfilled promises that accompanied the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Setting national mandates while allowing individual states to create their own procedures leaves questions regarding how NCLB is actually going to yield any measurable results. Whether in favor, or opposed to NCLB, there is unanimous agreement that this legislation's impact on public education continues to influence schools and school leaders. Parlow (2007) writes that in a research study examining contextual factors related to elementary principal turnover in which superintendent turnover rate, building enrollment, student attendance, student mobility, pupil-teacher ratio, teacher attendance, student achievement in reading, and student achievement in mathematics were studied as factors, "the only variable that was statistically significant in predicting principal turnover was student achievement test scores on Ohio reading and math achievement tests" (p. 67). Indeed, the amount of publicized criticism that falls on the shoulders of principals has increased since NCLB began measuring and reporting adequate yearly progress (AYP) and rates of student proficiency in tested subject areas.

In addition to increased levels of stress, NCLB also has implications for future educational standards. Paige (2006) affirms that "the United States has approximately fifteen thousand school districts and nearly ninety-three thousand public schools. There are fifty different state governance structures overseeing these school systems" (p. 462). If the federal government is going to set the standard for student performance, there is also a need for a national curriculum with national tests. Permitting states to set individual curricula and individual means for measuring student achievement is not and

will not yield any national data indicating whether states are meeting the needs of all students, negating the original intentions of the act itself.

When examining the impact of NCLB on schools, noting the difference in clientele and the risk facing public education as a whole is implicit. New young parents with children in school “are a different breed, different because they have grown up in a society surrounded by choices and options in nearly every aspect of their lives” (Paige, 2006, p. 471). Public school choice is the mandatory first step for schools that are not performing to standard as defined by NCLB. The significance of school choice has negative implications for schools, families, and communities. Fusarelli (2004) writes, “in schools where children fail to make AYP in 2 consecutive years, students will be given the option to transfer to another public school” (p. 72). Because of the all or nothing AYP model, schools are losing students to school choice even when they are making documented progress for the exact groups of students that are departing.

In addition to voucher programs for charter schools in conjunction with school choice, public education is also in competition with forms of online schooling. The message that policymakers are sending voters with NCLB is that public education is not good enough. Implications of NCLB require educators, parents, and politicians to look ahead in order to determine if and how public education can be saved and whether the act is helping or hindering academic progress. Chapman (2007) warns: “Experts in educational testing and statistics optimistically project that 65 percent of schools will fail to make AYP by 2014; they pessimistically estimate that 85 percent will fail to hit the target” (p. 26). If indeed 85% of schools fail to reach the goal set by the federal

government in 2001, it is left to question where public education will stand in the eye of taxpayers and how this impacts schooling as a whole.

While NCLB is not the first attempt by the federal government to attach accountability measures to public education, it has indeed presented a new set of circumstances and challenges. Understanding sanctions of not meeting federal standards and planning instructionally to help all students achieve annual growth measures attaches stipulations to the work of principals. In order to better understand the extent of this impact, my research study will explore how NCLB impacts the daily work of young female principals.

Technology

Technology has changed the way teachers instruct, increased levels of access for parents and students, transformed the needs for professional development, and prioritized the allocation of resources. Testerman, Flowers, and Algozzine (2001) observe, “technology has changed the face of American education; technology competencies are part of the fundamental goals of effective schools” (p. 58). While the impact of technology has tremendous benefits for educators, students and parents, potential negative outcomes are also relevant. In an effort to illustrate technology’s impact on public education, it is necessary to describe technology in schools, highlight benefits, depict potential negative outcomes, and outline implications for schools in the twenty-first century.

Technology in Schools

In the process of defining technology, it is important to note that possible definitions are immeasurable. For the purpose of this research study, the explanation of technology is restricted to technology that is used in schools. No longer is technology an isolated curriculum that is taught solely as a ninth grade word processing course. Instead, technology is an integrated part of daily instruction in all subject areas. In *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*, Palfrey and Gasser (2008) discuss students' use of digital and mobile technologies "to access and use information and create new knowledge and art forms" (p. 23). Examples of these technologies include online social networking sites, cell phones, smart phones, blogs, wikis, email, instant messenger, webcams, iPods, as well as other technologies.

As a result of numerous forms of technology, students, teachers, parents, and administrators have opportunities to access information and communicate in ways that were unheard of just a few years ago. According to West et al. (2009), "the onset of email as the preferred form of communication has ensured that the principalship has moved closer to becoming a job that is completed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week" (p. 20). While technology can be defined in numerous ways, educators do not have the choice of standing by waiting for this trend to pass. If educators are going to access students, they must also learn to access technology.

Outcomes of technology. Outcomes of technology in schools are continuous and ever-changing. Increased levels of student achievement, parent access to principals and teachers, and student engagement are just the beginning of potential trends that have the

capacity to impact public education. In her book, *Using Technology to Increase Student Learning*, Linda Reksten, principal of Walt Disney Elementary School in Burbank, California, explains, “technological skills are not to be seen as a separate strand of the curriculum; instead they become tools to a natural expansion of the curriculum” (as cited in Ashton, 2002, p. 91). Rather than a separate course, technology is now a supplemental means of accessing the regular curriculum.

Technology also has the capacity to increase opportunities for all students to access materials and subject matter in an effort to close gaps for students who have typically had fewer advantages than other students in the traditional learning environment. For example, Carol Shepard (2008) writes, “by effectively utilizing technology, advanced placement courses could be offered to all students, in all countries, from all socio-economic groups” (p. 285). Current advanced placement courses have a significantly higher number of Caucasian middle class students than students that are representative of the school clientele as a whole. In this fashion, technology is “a means of leveling the field of opportunities for all students, from all areas of the country, and all countries of the world, so that no student is left behind in the pursuit of an education” (Shepard, 2008, p. 291).

The argument that technology has the potential for opening doors for previously marginalized populations is also countered by those who argue that the digital divide between students who have access to technology and those who do not is rapidly widening (Asselin & Moayeri, 2008). With the increased focus on accountability measures and the link between technology and increases in student achievement, it is

important to provide equitable access to technology in schools for all students rather than allowing access to technology to widen the gap between the haves and have-nots.

Another potential trend impeding student access to technology is the willingness of educators to integrate technology into daily instructional content. Frequently, educators are intimidated by their own lack of technological competence and are, therefore, less likely to introduce technology into the classroom, despite the possible benefits. In addition, research indicates that some teachers still fail to see the use of technology as a tool to facilitate other areas of the curriculum. A pre-service special education teacher wrote, “My students do not use the computer. I’m so busy working with them on reading for comprehension, oral discussion, and assessment that I can’t seem to include anything else” (Iding, Crosby, & Speitel, 2002, p. 163). Indeed, if teachers continue to view technology as an additional responsibility rather than a means to accessing other curricular objectives, increased student use for learning is far less likely to occur.

As with any trends that have potential positive outcomes for student achievement, it is important to note potential negative outcomes that surface as a result of increased technology in schools. Recent economic declines have been universal, thus magnifying the barriers of time, access, and money when attempting to increase student technology access in schools. As Asselin and Moayeri (2008) report, “districts and schools want to promote Internet literacy but are limited by funds and by liability” (p. 8). Just as resources limit the expansion of technology, educators are often hesitant to increase technology access due to liability of student access when using the Internet.

While technology has dramatically improved over time in terms of user-friendliness, teachers who are willing to use technology in instruction are frequently faced with challenges when the technology does not work properly. In an article entitled, *High-Tech's High Hopes Meet Student Realities*, Peck, Cuban, and Kirkpatrick (2002) found, “teachers reported that server crashes and technological malfunctions doomed many lessons and forced them to construct—and repeatedly resort to—backup plans” (p. 53). Reaching frustration levels with technology has the potential outcome of causing teachers to revert to more reliable and less engaging pencil and paper practices.

Implications of technology. In “The Net Generation,” the article in which the term “growing up digital” was coined, John Seely Brown says that “the Internet will have as transformative an effect on how future generations learn, work and play as the introduction of electricity had on daily life in the nineteenth century” (Wagner, 2008, p. 171). School personnel and parents are quickly coming to terms with how much more knowledgeable students are than adults when navigating technological advances. Teachers, parents, students, and administrators are faced with the charge of keeping up with the latest trends in technology to even remain among the status quo. Susan McLester of *Technology and Learning* (2001) writes: “As more than a few of us have observed, it is not unusual for students to possess the highest degree of knowledge, competence, and confidence when it comes to computers and the Internet, while the superintendent possesses the least” (p. 26). Implications for system level administrators and other members of the educational environment include the need for ongoing professional

development in order to stay abreast of the latest trends and best practices in public education.

Supporters and those in opposition of technology in schools agree that the rapidly changing digital world continues to change the face of education as we once knew it, resulting in numerous implications for practicing administrators, teachers, and policymakers. Increases in accountability measures are closely linked to the need for students and teachers to be considered proficient in their own use of technology. Forty-five states have state testing standards in technology, and nine of these states require a technology-related exit exam for graduation. In addition, several states have passed mandates on teachers' competency; for example, North Carolina and Idaho launched plans to demonstrate technology competence for certification and licensure (Slowinski, 2003, p. 25). Because of extensive research supporting the link between achievement and increased student access to technology, several states have implemented one-to-one initiatives. Mendicino, Razzaq, and Herrernan (2009) inform "Maine, Indiana, Michigan, and Virginia have begun to implement one-to-one computing in schools where each child gets his/her own laptop to use during school hours and often to take home" (p. 247). Additional implications highlight the need to overcome obstacles that are currently preventing students from accessing technology in the daily instructional environment. "Barriers to technology integration in classrooms include: limited classroom space, unwillingness to take students to labs, lack of access at teachers' and students homes, and finding the time and resources to implement classroom technologies" (Park & Ertmer, 2007/2008, p. 247).

In order to produce globally competitive citizens, schools in the twenty-first century are facing challenges to integrate technology at all schooling levels. While increased technology calls for more resources and more time during an economic period in which people are being asked to do far more with far less, there is little question that technology is a means of reaching this generation of students. Public education is charged with providing relevant means of accessing technology, which presents a unique set of challenges to parents, educators, and school leaders currently striving for increased levels of student achievement and overall effective schooling. Technology has the potential to change the way students receive their education in addition to the possibilities of new forms of parent-school collaboration and increased access of teachers and principals. The impact of technology research on the principalship will be explored during my research study as young female school leaders describe how technology impacts their daily work.

Socio-cultural Factors

Socio-cultural factors, including ethnic diversity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation influence schooling and impact the work of principals. Since Wolcott's work in 1973, schools have changed in terms of socio-cultural makeup. Examining the socio-cultural changes in schools and discussing how socio-cultural factors influence principals is necessary in understanding the work of principals in the twenty-first century.

While the increased diversity in schools is widely acknowledged, this topic is rarely explicitly discussed in schools themselves. As Cooper (2009) reports, "racial and ethnic minorities are on the cusp of becoming the nation's majority" and as a result, "the United States and its schools are therefore more racially, culturally, and linguistically

diverse than ever before” (p. 699). With increasing levels of diversity, inequities often become the norm rather than the exception. The implication for principals is that

in the midst of demographic change, students need leaders and advocates who are prepared to be cultural change agents—educators armed with the knowledge, strategies, support, and courage to make curriculum, instruction, student engagement, and family partnerships culturally responsive. (Cooper, 2009, p. 695)

Ethnic Diversity

When discussing the work of school leaders in 2010 compared to the 1970s, an understanding that schools are more ethnically diverse than ever before is an essential consideration. While the makeup of students is becoming more diverse, the ethnic composition of teachers and principals remains largely Caucasian, thus raising the issue of whether schools have the capacity and knowledge to be culturally responsive places of learning (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Carr and Klassan (1997) concur, “Teachers are, undoubtedly, an important factor, and the influence of the lived experiences of predominantly White teachers and administrators working with an increasingly racially diverse student body needs to be understood” (p. 68). Socio-cultural factors related to ethnic diversity call for teachers and principals to acknowledge and address their own biases and privileges associated with ethnic diversity in order to create a culture that embraces an increasingly diverse school climate. Cooper, Allen, and Bettez (2009) note, “the cultural diversity of this nation, and the imbalance of power among various racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups, has long resulted in social conflicts that affect public schools” (p. 104).

Ethnic diversity is likely to become even more significant over the next several decades. By 2050, it is predicted that half of the student population will be Hispanic, many of whom will still be in the process of learning English (Carr & Klassan, 1997). Addressing these students' academic, and economic, needs will be a critical consideration for policymakers in education and therefore also for individual school leaders. Furthermore, Klauke (1989) says, "Immigration, migration, and fertility patterns indicate that by the year 2010 about 38 percent of people under the age of 18 in the United States will be African, Asian, or Hispanic American" (p. 1). This means that there will likely be more diversity within student populations, as well as school system employees (Nagel, 1999).

Principals, as school leaders, set the tone for the rest of the school community in terms of being inclusive of all school community members regardless of ethnic background. Therefore, they are charged with being knowledgeable about their own biases and values, other cultures' values and needs, and research-based interventions that are appropriate for various cultural groups (Theoharis, 2007).

Implications of ethnic diversity. Acknowledging diversity in schools is necessary for establishing sound practices that are inclusive of all cultures. Stereotypes related to ethnic diversity and socioeconomic status can serve as barriers between school personnel and parents. "Resistance to empower parents can increase particularly if they [school personnel] equate parents' disadvantaged economic status and racial, cultural, or linguistic background with their lack of the knowledge and experience to offer valid and meaningful input" (Cooper & Christie, 2005, p. 2269). For example, a parent's inability

to speak English as their primary language is not an indicator of intelligence or an investment in education. These parents likely have information about their children that could be useful for school leaders and teachers. It is the school's responsibility to ensure that these parent's contributions are able to be accessed through the use of bilingual forms, interpreters, and other such methods (Gordon, 2008).

Varying ethnicities within a school or any organizational setting calls into question whether school cultural norms are accepting of increased levels of diversity. Burrello and Reitzug (1993) write, "the beliefs, values and assumptions that constitute an organization's culture guide employee action and behavior. Actions that are incongruent with these cultural norms become inappropriate; those congruent with them are pursued" (p. 669). Within the school setting, these behaviors have significant implications as largely Caucasian staff members can often promote norms associated with being White, without realizing the impact on non-White students. School leaders are instrumental in modeling awareness and appropriate behaviors associated with inclusion, acceptance, and appreciation of ethnic diversity.

Frequently, people who are privileged because of their ethnic background, fail to see the role that privilege plays in their daily interactions and experiences. As reported by Cooper (2009), "educators who consciously exude a color-blind approach typically do not understand how White privilege operates in schools" (p. 699). Color-blindness is not the equivalent of acceptance and appreciation of ethnic diversity, but instead minimizes the valuable differences between ethnic backgrounds (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Schofield,

1997; Selden, 2003). Principals are encouraged to acknowledge ethnic differences and address practices accordingly.

According to Appiah (2006), “unfortunately, we live in societies that have not treated certain individuals with respect because they were, for example, women, homosexuals, blacks, Jews” (p. 19). Within the school setting, the responses and direction of teachers and principals are essential in developing an inclusive school climate. “The responses of other people obviously play a crucial role in shaping one’s sense of who one is” (Appiah, 2006, p. 19). In addition to serving as change agents, being teachers and principals who are cultural leaders, requires,

recognizing power inequities and making them explicit, aligning one’s self with marginalized and oppressed groups, promoting collective action, striving to empower oppressed groups, and being straightforward about one’s agenda while remaining open to new ideas and constructive critique (Cooper, 2009, p. 700).

Implications of changing ethnic demographics within the school setting are significant for school leaders. Wegenke and Shen (2005) write, “the relationships formed between school leaders (principal and faculty), students, and parents, are critical elements in not only addressing diversity issues in school, but concurrently serving as models for demographic changes taking place in the nation’s communities” (p. 18). Indeed, schools have always served as a microcosm of larger society. Addressing ethnic diversity is central to building the capacity and awareness of students so that they are able to “experience, understand, and learn to respect individual differences” (Wegenke & Shen, 2005, p. 18).

As schools become increasingly more ethnically and culturally diverse, acknowledging the role that socio-cultural factors play in the work of school leaders is also essential. Cultural differences significantly contribute to the practices of principals, including decisions surrounding when to begin their careers. In one study of how women administrators negotiate work-family conflicts, Loder (2005) found:

White administrators tended to prioritize their aspirations to become principals over their desires to start families of their own, as evidenced by their decisions to sequence the principalship before family building while Black aspiring principals prioritized their goal to start families of their own over their expressed desire to become principals by extending their duration in the assistant principalship until their children got older. (p. 769)

Upbringing and cultural norms correlate with, and sometimes inform, leadership practices. In addition to impact on career timing, cultural norms also play a role in how principals lead their schools (e.g., handling conflict, prioritizing their time). In a study of Black and White leadership in an urban high school, Brooks and Jean Marie (2007) found, “School leaders construct leadership norms and beliefs based on race, and that these are intertwined with other social dynamics such as gender and social class” (p. 765). It is therefore important to consider a variety of variables that might be impacting school leaders’ work including race, ethnic diversity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Along with other factors, these together comprise a principal’s identity, and influence how they view their roles and how they carry out their work.

Socioeconomic Status

Just as the ethnic make-up of American society has changed from the 1970s to 2010, shifts in socioeconomic status are also important to illustrate when examining

changing demographics in schools. Similar to the difference in ethnic makeup of teachers and students, the socioeconomic divide is also relevant. Frequently, teachers draw on, and make decisions based upon, their own schemas and experiences, thus resulting in a disconnect with students from different socioeconomic status. Harlin (2008) writes,

Since more than 80 percent of teachers in U.S. classrooms are white, middle-class females, there is a critical need to develop teachers' ability to effectively understand, support, and teach students who are socioeconomically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. (p. 331)

Principals are faced with ensuring that teachers are culturally competent to work with all students within a school building. This may mean providing supervision, modeling, or professional development opportunities. Documentation of inappropriate conduct of school staff with regard to culture is also principals' responsibility.

Implications of socioeconomic status. In selecting appropriate professional development opportunities for teachers, school leaders have a responsibility to create an inclusive and informed culture within schools to address the socioeconomic differences between teachers and students that are certain to impact the learning process. Perhaps the most telling data related to the impact of socioeconomic status and student achievement is highlighted by the significant achievement gap between students from low-income versus middle and high-income homes. Beiswinger (2009) states, "Recent reports indicated that only 28% of high-achieving, first-grade students come from low-income homes, suggesting that achievement disparities begin before students enter elementary school" (p. 17). Overcoming achievement disparities and creating schooling environments where students and parents have access to resources that level the playing

field is an important responsibility of school leaders in the twenty-first century.

Equipping students from economically disadvantaged homes with the tools they need to be successful in school is not an option for public education.

Neuman and Celano (2006) state,

The recent National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that economically advantaged children score at or above the basic level of reading at nearly twice the rate compared to those who are disadvantaged. Lower achieving children who are often poor and members of minority groups face greater challenges in comprehending materials and are at greater risk of falling behind and dropping out. (p. 179)

Studies about the implications of socioeconomic status in schools cite the importance of understanding the obstacles that face students from impoverished homes. Thomas and Stockton (2003) inform:

The U.S. Department of Education conducted *The Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance (LESCP) in Title I Schools* (2001a) to determine the effectiveness of Title I schools. Key findings were that individual and school poverty had a clear, negative effect on student achievement and that students who attended schools with the highest percentages of poor students performed worse initially on both reading and mathematics tests. (p. 3)

While the socioeconomic status of students has always impacted schools, changes in demographics over the last decade have caused socioeconomic status to play an even more significant role. Borjas (2006) notes, “The very large ethnic differences in economic status that characterize the current immigrant population will likely dominate American society—and discussions of American social policy—for much of the 21st Century” (pp. 3-4). Understanding the changes in demographics and their implications,

and using this knowledge to inform educational practices and policies is implicit for public education to meet the needs of diverse students. Principals, therefore, must be informed of evidence-based practices targeting various socioeconomic status groups in order to meet the needs of all students.

Age and Gender

As a young female principal, I am especially interested in examining the work of principals who are in my age cohort and identify as female. Differences in perceptions and experiences of male leaders versus female leaders and young leaders versus older leaders are important to note when understanding the impact of age and gender on the work of principals.

Perceptions of age in leadership. According to Sargeant (2001), “age discrimination in employment consists of decisions made by an employer, about an individual, that are based on an individual’s chronological age” (p. 144). Within the research, there is a great deal of literature discussing discrimination of older employees in the workplace while discrimination or even experiences of their younger counterparts remain largely unexplored. The same is true for research surrounding leadership as it relates to age. Additionally, while there is research related to gender and leadership, there is little regarding age and leadership. Barbuto and colleagues (1997) note, “Although a great deal of research has concerned the relationship between leadership and gender, few researchers have explored the relationship between leadership and age” (p. 71).

It is relevant to explore age’s influence on leadership, since age has the capacity to influence leadership styles and priorities. Nycz-Conner (2009) informs, “Common

stereotypes about older workers include: They are more expensive, with higher compensation and benefits costs. They are resistant to change. And employers fear age discrimination lawsuits if they have to lay off recently hired older workers” (para. 27). In addition to cost-related fears, older workers are often not provided the same opportunities for training and advancement as younger workers, as employers tend to invest more time and money in employees who are more likely to stay with the company for longer periods of time. Sargeant (2001) says, “What formal training does exist is concentrated on the young, and the older a worker becomes, the less likely that they will receive the benefit of training” (p. 147). While inequalities exist in the perceptions of older leaders different types of inequalities surface in the perceptions of young leaders.

Younger leaders can also be seen as less mature and therefore less able to handle difficult situations. In addition, younger leaders are perceived as less likely to have the experience needed to be effective principals. Rodriguez-Compos et al. (2005) state, “The years of experience in teaching and the positions held before becoming a principal are important for a successful principalship” (p. 311). Indeed if years of classroom experiences and the number of leadership positions held are primary hiring criteria for principals, younger applicants are less likely to be viewed favorably than older candidates. In addition to experiential history, young can also be associated with immature. Many studies suggest that emotions and emotional sensitivity increase with age (Carstensen, 1992; Carstensen & Charles 1991; Frederikson & Carstensen 1990). Because young leaders can be perceived as having less experience and levels of maturity

by association, they may have to navigate discriminatory practices at the onset of their careers.

Understanding how age is perceived by society is relevant in understanding the work of young school leaders. Inexperience is naturally associated with principals who are younger than their colleagues. Dunshea (1998) says, “There are issues around the notion of isolation and the need for support, for newly-appointed principals” (p. 204). The principalship can be a lonely role, as time does not permit for a great deal of collaboration and young school leaders are often trying to prove they are competent in their role.

Understanding priorities and leading with intention are noted as challenges for young principals. Walker and Carr-Stewart (2006) argue, “Neophyte principals tend to have problems with role clarification. They tend to question who they are and what they should be doing after becoming principals” (p. 19). Identifying a purposeful concept of self is common for all young adults; however, new principals are coming to terms with this sense of self-understanding while trying to prove themselves as they go through what Huberman (1989) “called a survivalist stage of development” (Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 21). Similar to the research on gender, the issues surrounding the perception by young leaders of others as well as how young leaders are perceived by others are of interest in this study. Understanding the research behind how young leaders experience the principalship and overcome challenges is important in researching the work of young female principals. Additionally, Parkay and Hall (1992) state, “The more we learn today from novice principals about how to meet the challenges of beginning leadership, the

better off tomorrow's schools, students, and new principals will be" (as cited in Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 18).

Perceptions of gender in leadership. How male and female leaders are viewed in the workplace is a relevant topic when examining the story of the principalship as told by female leaders. "Think manager-think male" is a concept that was referred to in the 1970s (Schein, 2007). According to researchers, females' views of leadership are changing, while males' views are not (Schein, 2007). This shift may also affect how employees working with male or female leaders perceive their leadership.

Researchers have found that evaluators and supervisors may have different expectations of leaders depending on their genders. Powell et al. (2008) write, "Behaviors exhibited by a male leader are evaluated more favorably than identical behaviors exhibited by a female leader" (p. 157). When examining why male leadership traits are evaluated more favorably, it is necessary to explore preconceived notions of male versus female styles of leadership. Weyer (2007) found that

male leaders tend to use rewards and punishment to influence performance, a behavior generally more associated with transactional leadership styles. On the other hand, women leaders tend to employ a leadership style built upon interpersonal relationships and the sharing of power and information, usually associated with transformational leadership. (p. 490).

Transformational leadership is more relationship-oriented and focuses on interests of both parties (leader and follower) while transactional leadership includes contingent rewards, and transactional leaders are more likely to be heavily involved when problems arise (Maher, 1997). Although it is unclear if workplaces tend to favor transactional or

transformational forms of leadership, there is little doubt that society continues to view male and female leaders differently. These preconceived notions, based on gender stereotypes, appear to be true for leaders inside and outside the field of education.

Research indicates that the concept of gender stereotyping has significantly impacted the ways in which women lead and struggle to maintain equity in the workplace. Schein (2007) states, “All else being equal, a male appears more qualified, by virtue of his gender alone, than does a female to enter and advance in management” (p. 7). Indeed, many studies indicate that females adjust their leadership styles to be more masculine in an effort to fit society’s perception of the traditional workplace leader or manager. Loden (1985) indicates that ‘masculine modes of management’ are characterized by competitiveness, hierarchical authority, and emphasis on control. Regardless of whether these leadership practices provide a sound and ethical workplace, women find themselves adopting traits associated with masculinity in order to be viewed as successful leaders.

Societal trends that exist within schools often bring to question certain injustices that exist within educational leadership. Blackmore and Kenway (1993) write, “administration has become associated with a particular type of masculinity—that of the heterosexual, white, rational and technically capable male” (p. 30). *The Man in the Principal’s Office* fits this gender stereotype as the white middle-aged male as principal.

Experiences of male and female leaders. Experiences of male and female leaders vary, sometimes indicating similarities, but also exhibiting significant differences. Mueller, Mulinge, and Glass (2002) state, “In regard to the workplace stressors, we see

that women and men do not differ significantly in the routinization of their work, workload, or role ambiguity” (p. 173). Leaders within similar contexts seem to have similar experiences, regardless of gender. It is only when the work of leaders is examined with a wider scope outside of the daily routines that discrepancies surface.

Glass ceilings, difficulty balancing work and family, and salaries are frequently cited issues facing female leaders. Women administrators continue to report experiences with glass ceilings, exclusion from district power networks, and gender-based role expectations (Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1996). Because of their gender, females experience the workplace differently than men when it comes to upward mobility and aligning themselves with powerful colleagues. Additionally, while many workplaces are claiming to respond to the need to balance family and work, many female leaders still have difficulty managing both roles effectively. Luce and Brenner (2006) write, “Professional women who struggle to balance both job and family suffer a penalty in a work world that has changed very little in response to this reality” (pp. 82-83). In a world where women are largely considered to still be the primary caregivers, acknowledging the difficulty of maintaining workplace leadership duties and maternal responsibilities effectively is an important consideration when discussing differences among educational leaders.

Intersection of age and gender. Although research discusses age and gender as separate entities, it is also significant to understand the intersection of age and gender. The intersection of age and gender and its implications for young female principals is important to explore, particularly since this is a topic that is not well-researched to date. Dunshea (1998) writes, “Where female principals are appointed they will find little help

in the academic and professional literature concerning the lived experience of principals since this literature has an androcentric bias” (p. 203). Indeed, to date, many research studies of the principalship have drawn conclusions based on the experiences of middle-aged, male school leaders. A knowledge base largely created based on the experiences of middle-aged male principals, could potentially cause problems if these experiences are assumed to be the same for young, female principals.

Just as *The Man in the Principal’s Office* is a story of a principal who is middle-aged and male, there is indeed a need to explore the principalship with young and female as research parameters. Conner and Sharp (1992) concur:

for the most part, the subjects and the researchers are men ... problems arise when the results are generalized to include female experiences and when the results become standards and norms by which all experience is measured and valued (p. 338).

The current study of young, female principals examines how their work is informed by not only their age and gender, but also by contextual factors that are known to be significantly different in 2010 than they were in the 1970s, including context, sociocultural factors, and individual personal experience. The result is a young, female principal’s perspective of the work of twenty-first century principals revealed through autoethnographic and interview data from practicing young female school leaders.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Until the lions have their own historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.
—African Proverb

Conceptual Framework

The work of principals is the central component of the conceptual framework (see Figure 1) for this research study. In particular, this is an investigation of the principalship through the lens of five young, female principals in the early twenty-first century.

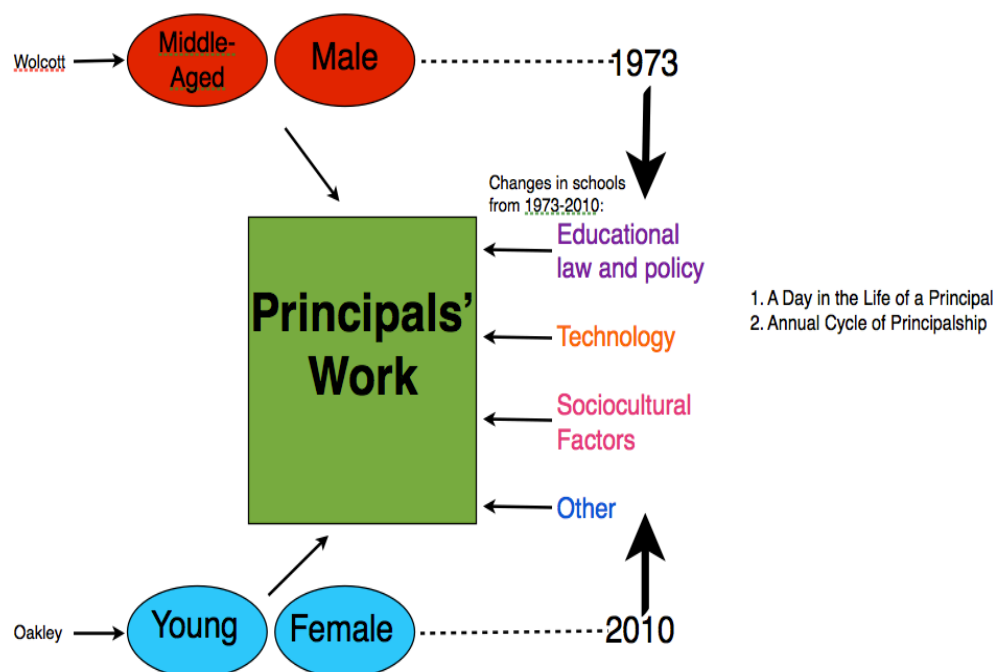


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

This study examines how being young and female in the current educational and socio-cultural and political context impacts their work as principals. Significant influences in the current context include legal and political influences, technological influences, and sociocultural influences. Wolcott's 1973 study examining Ed Bell's principal role as a middle-aged, male served as the foundation for this conceptual framework, borrowing two specific categories from that book: (a) A Day in the Life, and (b) The Annual Cycle of the Principalship. These categories are discussed in the current study, portraying the 2010 reality and drawing comparisons with Wolcott's 1973 descriptions.

The purpose of this study was to explore the principalship, specifically from the perspective of female principals under the age of forty who are currently working in public elementary schools in one southeastern state. The primary objectives were to understand the characteristics of the work these principals do, the influences on their work, and the personal characteristics of the principals, themselves, that impact their work. Qualitative methods provided the basis for this investigation. Specifically autoethnography, focused interviews, and document analysis were utilized to examine the principalship for young, female principals.

Autoethnographies in their truest form can provide significant insight by using the researcher as participant within a particular cultural or social group. As a participant in my own research, I utilized autoethnography as the primary methodological approach. Additionally, focused interviews and document analysis with other young female principals provided secondary data for this study. As defined by Eisner (1998), structural corroboration is a "means through which multiple types of data are related to each other

to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs” (p. 110).

Structural corroboration, including data triangulation and methods triangulation, provide credibility for the autoethnographic data collected (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002).

Presentation of findings is reported in a constructed narrative by weaving together data from all corroborated sources.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the work of a young, female principal like in the early part of the twenty-first century?
2. What influence does context (e.g., legal/political, technological, and socio-cultural factors) have on the work of young, female principals?
3. What influence do individual personal experiences have on the work of young, female principals?

Research Design

Autoethnography, focused interviews, and document analysis were used in this study. This approach to data gathering uses data triangulation and methods triangulation. As described by Ary et al. (2002), “the use of multiple sources of data is referred to as triangulation” (p. 435). When the different procedures and data sources are found to be in agreement, there is corroboration. When interviews, related documents, and recollections of other participants produce the same description of an event, evidence of credibility exists (Ary et al., 2002), thereby increasing the trustworthiness of findings. In addition, interviews with other young, female principals helped protect the confidentiality of

teachers, staff, and others affiliated with the primary researcher's school and the schools of the other research participants.

This research study used a combination of autoethnography and interviews. Autoethnographic data collected from my own work was used in conjunction with interview data from four other young, female principals in order to construct a composite narrative that was used to report the findings describing the work of these school leaders.

This autoethnographic account of my principalship, coupled with data gathered from in-depth interview sessions with four young female principals as well as a variety of work-related documents from the research participants, seeks to extend our understanding of the principalship, schools, and society by providing a realistic account with actual stories and circumstances used to construct the study's central narratives. I served as the fifth interviewee, and a student from a different doctoral program conducted my interview. Providing a narrative account of the principalship in the form of autoethnography illustrates significant events, interactions, and stories in a unique form compared to other formats of qualitative research.

Autoethnography

Qualitative methodology seeks to understand experiences as a whole, while the research itself is an interactive process in which the persons studied teach the researcher about their lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Autoethnography is most often described as a personal experience narrative of the author/researcher, which extends sociological understanding (Sparkes, 2000).

For a number of literary critics and sociologists, autoethnography ‘connects the autobiographical impulse with the ethnographic,’ offering an alternative to a tendentiously-characterized ‘conventional’ autobiography, on the one hand, and to the exoticizing, native-silencing brand of anthropology, on the other. (Buzard, 2003, p. 73)

While conducting an autoethnography can pose challenges related to subjectivity and acknowledgement of self, this qualitative research practice allows the researcher to share stories and occurrences in an intimately narrative form that provides tangible data. Ricci (2003) says that autoethnography is as much about ‘discovery’ as it is about telling something in a narrative order. Combining an understanding of self within one’s context can impart a pragmatic glimpse that other forms of data collection lack.

Within the practice of autoethnography, obvious advantages and disadvantages surface when referring to one’s ability to collect and accurately report data that she is collecting about herself. In fact, Fox (2008) writes that “experience is always already an interpretation and in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always political” (p. 52). Even through the writer is interpreting her experiences through her writing, the result is a story that readers still have to interpret in order to gain meaning.

In order to overcome concerns surrounding the credibility of autoethnography, the researcher must develop and define a true sense of self in a variety of situations. While many researchers use perspectives of others to demonstrate their findings, the autoethnographer must acknowledge her own perspectives and subjectivity in the most realistic approach possible. Ellis (2004) reports that “autoethnographic research seeks

generalizability not just from the respondents but also from the readers” (p. 195) and “intends to open up rather than close down conversation” (p. 22).

Data Collection

Focused interviews. Two separate interviews were conducted with four female elementary school principals under the age of forty during the data collection process. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz (1991) note that “interviews are at the heart of doing ethnography because they seek the words of the people we are studying, the richer the better, so that we can understand their situations with increasing clarity” (p. 58).

The first interview with each principal focused on gathering general information about the person’s principalship and personal priorities and histories. The second interview with each principal was used to capture a detailed narrative account of events that occurred on the day of, or the day before the interview occurred (see Appendix A).

Autoethnographic data collection. The study began as purely autoethnographic in nature. I used document analysis, including weekly logs of events and my personal calendar with anecdotal notes in order to portray the work of my own principalship. I began data collection when I first became a principal in 2008 and continued collecting autoethnographic data until 2010. However, due to confidentiality concerns related to protecting the anonymity of teachers, staff, parents, and students at my own school, I decided to also collect data from other young, female principals through focused interviews. Within focused interviews, according to Ary et al. (2002), “subjects are free to answer in their own words rather than having to choose from predetermined options”

in an “unstructured, open-ended format” (p. 27). Interview data significantly strengthened the study by providing multiple sources of data from which to identify trends and draw conclusions, while protecting confidentiality of participants and their schools. I served as the fifth interviewee, and an outside interviewer, a doctoral student in a different department, conducted the interviews with me. The homogenous group of participants provided corroboration for my own personal accounts of the principalship and added credibility to my experiences. In selecting which data to report within the composite story, encounters and incidents were selected that could have been told by any one of the five participants. Due to the nature of the principalship itself, all encounters are unique in nature; however, for the purpose of data reporting, stories selected were either repeated by more than one participant or were stories that could have likely happened to any of the research participants.

Document analysis is defined as “a research method applied to written or visual materials for the purpose of identifying specified characteristics of the material” (Ary et al., 2002, p. 442). In conjunction with data collected from principal interviews and autoethnographic data, documents, systematically collected during my experiences as a principal, contribute to the credibility of this study. For the purpose of this research study, documents consisted of weekly agendas, relevant emails, and anecdotal calendar notes. All weekly agendas and all relevant emails have been filed since July of 2008. Emails range from correspondences with staff members, central office personnel, and colleagues and are categorized as personnel, calendar, curriculum, testing/accountability, or

personal. Emails were deemed relevant if I considered them to be important enough to be filed for future reference.

In addition, daily anecdotal notes taken from my work calendar indicate brief reflections and upcoming priorities. These notes were taken by hand on the date of each logged event within my calendar. Calendar details combined with anecdotal notes provided a source of data that documented my daily work. Deal (2008) states, “Your calendar can be very revealing of your actual priorities as opposed to your good intentions” (p. 62). This reflective practice has been ongoing since July of 2008. While these forms of autoethnographic data are not inclusive of every event or interaction that happened in my principalship during this time period, the weekly agendas, relevant emails, and anecdotal calendar notes provide a realistic cross-section of my professional practices, challenges, and priorities as a young female school leader. In order to corroborate my own document analysis, I gathered a sample calendar from each participant. Two participants provided a day calendar excerpt, two provided a week excerpt, and one provided a month excerpt. Due to lack of specificity, calendars were not as helpful as originally anticipated. However, notes regarding how time was spent for each subject participant were helpful in tracking daily and annual events. Calendars were used to ensure that events were parallel and that narrative accounts, both daily and annual, were reflective of the work of all participants.

Selection of Participants

Participants were selected from three school systems located in two different regions of North Carolina: (a) Western North Carolina, and (b) the Piedmont Region of

North Carolina. Focused interviews were utilized as a means to gather data from participants. School systems were selected based on my personal relationships or members of my professional network's personal relationships with the district's superintendent. Superintendents nominated participants from the larger population of principals within their districts who met the study's requirement of being under 40 and female. I contacted principals who were nominated by their superintendents via email to determine their willingness to participate in the research study. Of the principals contacted, one principal stated that she was over the age of forty and four principals met the selection criteria and agreed to participate. These four principals participated in focused interviews, with my own autoethnographic data utilized as a fifth interview.

Of the five principals participating in this study, all five were practicing elementary principals under the age of forty with fewer than five years of experience in the principalship. Although the study sample was not restricted for ethnic diversity or the level of school in which the principals were practicing, all study participants were Caucasian elementary school principals. Battle and Gruber (2009) report that during the 2007-2008 school year, only 17.6% of U.S. principals were from minority backgrounds. In rural areas, 9.3% were minorities; and in small towns, only 6.2% were minorities (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2009). Given the small percentage of principals of color, the percentage of those principals who are both female and young is likely very small. Unfortunately, in the districts selected for this study, there were no young, female principals of color. As a result, this study is only able to reflect the experiences of

Caucasian principals and is not intended to reflect the experiences of all young, female principals.

Realizing the limitations of only having Caucasian principals in the study sample, data presented is limited in terms of perspective. According to Walker (1993), experiences of Black women in management differ from those of other women. Additional research suggests that demographics in research, unless specifically stated, typically describe points of view of those who are White, heterosexual, and middle class (Indvik, 2004). It is therefore necessary to understand that perspectives from principals of different ethnic backgrounds are absent from this research study, and data collected may have been different had the sample been more diverse.

Because the focus of the study was to tell the story of the principalship from the young, female perspective, these were the only purposive criteria used in participant selection. Principals ranged in age from 28 to 36, with a mean and median age of 31. Study participants each had a master's degree, and one participant had a specialist degree. All five study participants were married, and three of the five had at least one child. The schools in which they were principals at the time they were interviewed varied in size from 350-550 students. All five schools had greater than 40% students receiving free/reduced lunch and followed the traditional school calendar. An overview profile of each principal is provided in Table 1.

Participants' Schools

The principals who participated in this study work at four different types of school locales, as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (see

Table 2). The assigned locale codes provide additional information about the types of schools where participants are employed.

Table 1

Participants and Interviews

Pseudonym	Demographics	Interview Data	Professional Data
Principal A	Caucasian female, age 32, married, one child	Interview 1-at her school, 76 minutes Interview 2-at her school, 102 minutes	First principalship, one year in role, Master's in School Administration
Principal B	Caucasian female, age 37, married, no children	Interview 1-at her school, 64 minutes Interview 2-at her school, 60 minutes	First principalship, five years in role at same school, Master's in School Administration
Principal C	Caucasian female, age 29, married, no children	Interview 1-at her home, 85 minutes Interview 2-at her school, 73 minutes	First principalship, two years in role at same school, Educational Specialist Degree
Principal D	Caucasian female, age 33, married, one child	Interview 1-at coffee shop, 98 minutes Interview 2-at her school, 80 minutes	Second principalship, first year in role at current school, three years in previous principalship, pursuing Educational Specialist Degree
Principal E	Caucasian female, age 34, married, two children	Interview 1-at her school, 73 minutes Interview 2-at her school, 82 minutes	Second principalship, fourth year in role at current school, two years in previous principalship, Master's in School Administration

Table 2***Locale Codes of Participants' Schools***

Locale Code	NCES Definition
Town, Fringe	Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area
Rural, Distant	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster
Rural, Fringe	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster
City, Small	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000

Note. Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core Data, 2008-2009.

The demographic composition of participants' schools is important because it may influence their perceptions of their work. Table 3 displays general demographic data to provide a better sense of each participants' work environment.

Additionally, the composition of the student body can also potentially influence principals' perceptions of their work and influences. NCES reports demographic data for all enrolled students, kindergarten through fifth grade for each of the participants' schools. Student enrollment by race/ethnic diversity is reported below (see Table 4).

As a part of North Carolina's Accountability Model (NC ABC's), school data is reported online in the form of school report cards. Below is information reported in each participants' school report cards. Table 5 indicates the status of each school in terms of their school status label designation. These labels are useful for understanding proficiency levels of students.

Table 3***Demographic Data of Participants' Schools by NCES Locale Code***

NCES Locale Code	Student Enrollment	Classroom Teachers	Ratio of Teachers to Students	% Free and Reduced Lunch Eligible
School 1: Town, Fringe	320	22.8	1:14	24%
School 2: Rural, Distant	342	23.2	1:14.7	44.8%
School 3: City, Small	522	34.5	1:15.1	37%
School 4: Rural, Fringe	513	36.4	1:14.1	23%
School 5: Rural Fringe	522	37.8	1:13.8	20%

Source: Adapted from the National Center of Education Statistics Common Core Data, 2008-2009

Table 4***Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnic Diversity for Participants' Schools***

NCES Locale Code	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Black	Hispanic	White
School 1: Town, Fringe	<1%	<1%	42.2%	6.3%	50%
School 2: Rural, Distant	<1%	<1%	8.5%	5.3%	85.1%
School 3; City, Small	na	4.4%	22%	10.3%	63.2%
School 4: Rural, Fringe	1.6%	<1%	20.9%	6.6%	70.6%
School 5: Rural, Fringe	<1%	<1%	9.4%	11.9%	78.4%

Source: Adapted from the National Center of Education Statistics Common Core Data, 2008-2009

Table 5***Accountability Data Reported from 2008-2009 NC School Report Cards***

	School 1: Town, Fringe	School 2: Rural, Distant	School 3: Rural, Fringe	School 4: Rural, Fringe	School 5: City, Small
School Status	School of Progress	School of Progress	School of Progress	School of Progress	No recognition
Growth	High Growth	High Growth	Expected Growth	Expected Growth	Not reached
Reading Proficiency	75.7%	58.1%	70.8%	68.5%	71.4%
Math Proficiency	85.7%	79.3%	84.2%	82.3%	84.5%
Schoolwide Title I	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Adapted from the North Carolina Department of Education's School Report Cards, 2008-2009.

The North Carolina School Report Card also provides additional data describing characteristics of individual schools. Table 6 reports the ratio of students per instructional computer at participants' schools. Administrative computers are not included in these numbers, nor does this data reflect how instructional computers are used.

Table 6***Number of Students per Instructional Computer***

School Locale	School	District	State
Town, Fringe	3.63	3.52	2.72
Rural, Distant	2.88	3.02	2.72
Rural, Fringe	3.42	3.52	2.72
Rural, Fringe	4.47	3.52	2.72
City, Small	5.68	4.08	2.72

Source: Adapted from the North Carolina Department of Education's School Report Cards, 2008-2009.

Data Analysis

Using a secure server to maintain participants' confidentiality, I sent the audio interview recordings to a transcription company without identifying information. I then coded data from the transcripts into categories. Categories were created that reflected participants' work characteristics, contexts and personal experiences. Sub-categories were then defined to reflect data more accurately (see Table 7).

Table 7

Categories and Sub-categories Reflecting Principals' Reports

Category	Sub-category
Work Characteristics	A Day in the Life Annual Cycle of the Principalship
Context	Educational Policy and Law Accountability Special Education Child Custody Personnel Matters Technology
Individual Personal Experiences	Personal School Experiences Personal Relationships
Socio-cultural Factors	Age and Gender Ethnic diversity Socioeconomic status
Other	

In addition to conducting the interviews myself and reading transcribed versions of interviews, I also listened to the audio recordings during morning and afternoon work commutes to familiarize myself with the data and prepare for coding into categories. Word documents of interview transcriptions were then pasted into my major coding categories. During this process, it was important to acknowledge when data did not fit

into one of these categories, why it did not fit, and whether additional categories needed to be developed as a result (Ary et al., 2002). An “other” category was used as a catch-all category and analyzed once coding was completed to identify additional categories if necessary. Additional categories did not surface as a result of this analysis.

Narratives were constructed by pulling common themes and relevant examples that specifically addressed these themes. Data included in the narratives were consistent with stories told and examples cited across all research participants.

Subjectivity

Autoethnographies, by nature, present issues when discussing trustworthiness and subjectivity. As a mode of inquiry, autoethnographers must be careful to acknowledge sense of self within the context of their culture. Accurate collection of qualitative data on one’s experiences relies upon the ability of researcher to address herself within the context of her culture. Self-narrative within one’s own context can provide for explicit detail that is lacking when someone is telling a story about someone else in that person’s social context. In addition to subjectivity within the data itself, it is important to acknowledge subjectivity when coding data from the interviews with the other young female principals. If subjectivity and social contexts are accurately depicted, ethnography can indeed be used as a purposeful mode of inquiry within qualitative research. By analyzing my own autoethnographic story, while also including narrative data from interviews with other principals, the principalship is depicted in a meaningful and tangible way in order to provide readers with actual experiences from which they can form their own interpretations.

Defining the participant and setting is necessary when acknowledging subjectivity, especially in the autoethnographic form of qualitative research. Because I served the role of both participant and observer, addressing my own subjectivity is necessary to understand the findings presented here.

Effective acknowledgment of subjectivity requires the primary researcher to articulate personal characteristics that may impact perceptions of data. Growing up in a middle class home, my parents divorced when I was six years old. I was an only child until the age of 10 when my mom remarried. This made me an independent child, at home and at school. Both of my parents remained actively involved in my upbringing following their separation. Although they often argued, education and the importance of doing well in school remained a constant from both parents throughout elementary, middle, and high school. Education was highly valued in my family and has continued to be of high importance for me personally and professionally because of my parents' high standards in this realm.

Aside from my family, my own schooling experiences also had a significant impact on my perspective of schools and education. I adored most of my teachers and principals, with only a few exceptions that were limited to a handful of teachers who did not engage in a relationship with me as a student. I imagined myself as a teacher and drew upon their methods as models for teaching. Although I was always a successful student in school, I grew bored and restless early in high school. I did not feel as though the subject matter was relevant nor that the social aspects of high school were at all appealing. As a result, I left the traditional high school setting, completed two online

courses to fulfill diploma requirements, and began attending college at the age of sixteen. Again, I had a great amount of independence at a very young age.

After graduating from college, I began teaching in an academically at-risk first grade classroom. My classroom was comprised of 16 students, all of whom were students from ethnic minorities. My main task with this group of students was to teach them how to read. The focus was literacy during the entire school day, and I rarely worked on other academic concepts. There was an overall lack of support during my first year of teaching, therefore, I relied on my own independence and limited teaching experience to endure that first year.

In my second year of teaching, I changed school systems and began teaching kindergarten inclusion and spent the following three years teaching third grade in the same school. Once I switched school systems, the backgrounds of my students changed significantly with fewer minority students and fewer economically disadvantaged students in my classrooms. The accessibility and support I received from principals also shifted and I no longer had to rely strictly on my own independence and experience, but had mentors who were invested in my success and growth as a professional.

During my five years as a classroom teacher, I learned a great deal from my students. It is impossible to work that closely with a group of children and not learn a tremendous amount from them. First, I learned that meeting students where they are and acknowledging their prior experiences works better than attempting to have students meet the curriculum where it expects them to be. Second, I learned that all people, regardless of age or background, benefit from a safe environment in which there is not critical

judgment or biased values as obstacles to success. Finally, I learned that unless my work was engaging, students would not be able to grasp the content I was teaching. These three lessons continue to influence my work as a principal today when I meet with families, make decisions about the school environment, and plan staff development trainings.

Having experiences as both a special and general education teacher in schools with differing socio-cultural factors continues to contribute to my practices as a building-level leader. I am currently a thirty-year old female in my third year as the principal of A. Elementary School. I was hired in July of 2008, at which time I was twenty-eight years old. Prior to accepting my current position, I also spent 2 years as an assistant principal at B. Elementary School and 5 years as a classroom teacher, four of which were also spent at B. Elementary School.

Although both schools in which I have worked in an administrator role are in the same school district, there are distinct differences between the two. A. Elementary School, where I currently serve as the principal, is a rural school located in central North Carolina with approximately 350 students and 18 classroom teachers. B. Elementary School had approximately 550 students and 28 classroom teachers. The biggest differences between A. Elementary School and B. Elementary School are the difference in sizes of each of the schools, and the demographic composition of the two schools.

A. Elementary School is much smaller than B. Elementary and serves as the hub for all community activities. In some ways it seemed that beginning a career as a principal would be simpler at a smaller elementary school. For example, there would be fewer teachers to observe and a smaller annual budget to manage. However, a smaller

setting also provides more intimate relationships with staff, students, and families. This can be helpful and hindering depending on the day and the situation.

B. Elementary School is a school that serves a more affluent population. A. Elementary, however, is a small rural school with higher levels of poverty. This has challenged me to understand the culture and values associated with poverty and managing obstacles that lower socio-economic status presents for some students. There are several times per day that I must consider a student's family context when making decision regarding their academics.

Adjusting to a principal position at any school is a notable transition from an assistant principal position. As an assistant principal, there is always someone else responsible for making final decisions and delegating responsibilities. Leaving B. Elementary School and moving into a principal role at A. Elementary School meant becoming the person who was ultimately responsible for all decisions and delegations.

In addition to my former role as assistant principal, the five years I spent as classroom teacher also contribute to subjectivity. I frequently think about how decisions, systems, and structures affected my work as a classroom teacher and attempt to alleviate some of the challenges that I faced by respecting teachers as professionals, considering existing time commitments, and balancing affirmation of successes with support for growth. On the other hand, I also expect teachers to act like professionals, to prioritize their time with students' best interests in mind, and to continue to set professional goals that are attainable.

Because I am Caucasian, I must realize that my subjectivity is also framed by my white privilege. As McIntosh (1990) writes, “Whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege” (p. 31). The lack of personal acknowledgement of white privilege, does not, in fact, mean that this privilege does not exist. Similar to McIntosh (1990), my lack of realization of white privilege can be described as a form of ignorance: “I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth” (p. 36). Although unintentional, my whiteness is a factor that plays into my own subjectivity and the subjectivity of the other four research participants and can therefore play a role in relationships, decisions, and other leadership tasks (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Schofield, 1997; Selden, 2003).

As a young female principal, acknowledging the impact of gender and age is also relevant when defining subjectivity. Being young in the principalship has had both positive and negative implications for me. For example, having graduated from both college and graduate school within the last ten years, I have more current knowledge related to research-based best practices and am more likely to implement less traditional instructional practices at my school than some of my more experienced colleagues. Furthermore, it has only been four years since I was a classroom teacher so it is fairly easy to relate to teachers who work at my school.

Another positive aspect of being a young principal is that I am familiar with newer technology hardware and software that helps me complete professional tasks more

easily. I use productivity software, laptop computers, presentation software, and a handheld smart phone on a daily basis. This helps me with my work and also models the use of technology for staff and students.

While being young has several positive implications, negative characteristics of being a young principal also exist. I am conscious that older staff members and fellow administrators often have the feeling that I am inexperienced and sometimes feel like an assumption is made that I may be under-qualified. In addition, I wonder whether more experienced principals question my work ethic and sometimes think that I am overworking in an attempt to outshine them.

As a female, I must also pay attention to how gender impacts my subjectivity during the course of this research study. I do not perceive myself as having been marginalized as a practicing young female principal thus far in my experience. However, I do realize that some people call into question how I became a principal so early in my career. While I do not believe my career advancement had anything to do with my gender, I do realize that others may differ in their opinions. Working in an elementary setting, I also understand that I am a female working with mostly other females. Many teachers at my current school have said that they prefer working with male principals, but others have said that working with female principals is easier because they are easier to talk to. Regardless of the specific feelings of school staff, I understand that my gender potentially plays a role in how I am perceived by staff and colleagues.

Although I cannot pinpoint specific examples of how my age and gender may marginalize me as a young, female principal, I do realize the amount of time and energy

that I put into managing others' perceptions of me as a young, female principal. For example, I consider my attire on a daily basis depending on whose company I will be in during the day. I may choose to avoid skirts or dresses when meeting with parents or may choose to wear a suit if I will be with other administrators. I also try to complete everything that is requested of me prior to deadlines and as well as possible to avoid appearing overwhelmed or incapable of handling my responsibilities. The factors discussed in my own subjectivity further contribute to my lens as a young, female principal as they are interpreted as part of my own perceptions of myself and my experiences.

Trustworthiness

“Being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher, means at the least, that the processes of the research are carried out fairly, that the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people who are studied” (Ely et al., 1991, p. 93).

Corroboration is a noteworthy component of trustworthiness included in this study by utilizing a variety of sources of data to corroborate my own personal experiences as a young, female principal.

After conducting the first interview, which focused on leadership priorities and backgrounds, clear parallels across each participant's story were evident. These findings were confirmed during the data collection and analysis of the second interview in which each participant provided a narrative account of her day. Data saturation occurs when no new or unique forms of data surface, and data collected becomes redundant in nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This redundancy of data justifies the sample size in that data

collected was largely consistent with parallel stories across all five research participants.

Observations of self through autoethnographic data collection, focused interviews with other young female principals, and document analysis serve as three distinctly different sources of data when describing the work of young, female principals in the early twenty-first century. Acknowledging similarities and differences across these forms of data and methods contribute to the trustworthiness of the research study.

Composite Narrative

The story of the principalship told by this study is presented, in part, through the composite story of Meredith, a young, female principal under the age of forty practicing in the twenty-first century. The composite approach is used to protect the anonymity of the research participants. In constructing the composite portrait of Meredith, data were pulled from the stories of all five research participants, including myself. Meredith's story does not define which principals had which specific encounters in an effort to further protect the identity of the practicing principals. The composite story was largely formed by copying stories pulled directly from the data. In composing the narrative, I used a similar rationale for constructing the narrative as described by Reitzug and Reeves (1992) in their work: "criteria for inclusion were (a) frequency with which an item appeared in the data, (b) significance of an item as an exemplar of a theme or proposition, and (c) representativeness of an item of other similar items" (p. 195). The essence of the narrative is to provide a realistic portrayal of the work of these young female leaders as "simply listing themes and propositions followed by supporting data would fail to

provide the richness of description needed to satisfy the initial objective of the study” (Reitzug & Reeves, 1992, p. 194).

In order to form Meredith’s composite story, raw data was selected that was reflective of more than one research participant. Structural corroboration among the interview data, autoethnographic data, and document analysis allowed for the identification of commonalities which contributed to the construction of the narrative. Each selection listed within the composite stories was told explicitly by one research participant and was similarly discussed by at least one additional research participant. No accounts were used that were only discussed by one study participant, nor were stories used that could have only happened to one participant and not to others, due to restricting or unlikely circumstances. Raw data gathered was pulled from coded data from the five research participants. Stories and specific accounts were then pulled to form the composite portraits of Meredith that follow in Chapters IV and V. Examples of raw coded data are illustrated in Figure 2.

Existing sources that take a similar methodological approach include *You Sound Taller on the Telephone: A Practitioner’s View of the Principals* by Dunklee (1999) and *Reframing the Path to School Leadership: A Guide for Teachers and Principals* by Bolman and Deal (2002). Similar to Dunklee’s (1999) work, this research study examines the principalship “from the inside out” and “represents a real-life education leadership experience systematically represented through episodic progression” (p. vii). This research study tells a composite story of five practicing principals and uses “A Day in the

Life” of a principal and the “Annual Cycle of the Principalship” composite narratives to frame the progression of events.

Characteristics of the Work of Principals	Influences on the Work of Principals	Principal as a Person
<p>I stayed here till about 5:00 yesterday. Made lists for today, I organized things, I wrote down, I called parents, other parents about little stuff people call me about things. I tried to contact with central office several times. I spent a lot of time waiting for my email to try to come up or I tried to do an alert mail. I called parents back about lunch accounts because they print out lunch account thing for me every day and I got three kids on it that need to pay their lunch. Because they're up, their money's up. So I called them, left messages with all of them, waited to see if they would call me back. I started making a list for our newsletter. Cleaned up my office a bit. Principal A</p> <p>I've also had some interactions with some children that, per conversations with teachers and with parents, have helped direct some resources in the areas that they need to go in. So, it's just been good But, I'm ready for it to be over because we've got a budget to finish preparing, allotments that we have to do a proposal to central office, just some things that take uninterrupted time. Principal D</p>	<p>So just looking in that data, it really helps me direct where we go with each kid. Principal C</p> <p>I have walked into the classrooms and I have said to my students that this is an important time of year because the integrated test is coming up. You need to put your best effort forward because that score goes beside of your name. That's score, yeah, while it is under your teacher's name, it's not her score, it's your score. Principal E</p> <p>And at the end of the day, when I tell my staff is you are professional, and you have the skills and the knowledge and the intellect to make decisions about children and how you serve those children, but you need to be basing it on data because if you're just basing it on how you feel, what you think is right, you're doing a disservice to that child. So you need to look at informal assessments and formal assessments. You need to look at their socio-emotional needs. You need to...all those things need to play a role in how you're serving that child. Principal D</p>	<p>But professionally wise I think I struggle because I come across as very young a lot of times they'll come up to me and be like "who are you?" and I'm not seen as the administrator. I don't go out in the sun a lot and my parents have very good genes, even my grandma looks younger than she actually is but people don't take you as seriously because of that. I think. Principal A</p> <p>I'm very obsessive compulsive, OCD kind of, you know, everything's got to have it's space Principal B</p> <p>I'm a filer of about anything. All the copies and files on the computer that are all on a certain place but it allows me to get things when I need them and I think just being organized in that way, even in my home, I have bins and they have a label, for a drawer it has a label, and that's where I...because I know where it's at and I'm able to locate things quickly when I need them and I think that saves time. Time management I think is a big issue with me. Principal A</p>

Figure 2. Raw Coded Data Sample

As noted by Dunklee (1999), “managing in the complex, ever-changing education environment requires both recognition of and an ability to analyze each situation based on multiple and often conflicting influences” (p. viii). Just as the work of educational leaders is not linear and often requires fast-paced problem solving skills combined with the ability to multitask, the structure of the methodology is also framed around episodes and encounters drawn from interview data with each of the five research participants.

Reframing the Path to School Leadership (2002) tells a fictitious story of a new principal and teacher and the encounters they have as they navigate their first year. While Bolman and Deal’s (2002) work is divided into political, human resource, structural, and symbolic frames, dialogues and interactions provide a realistic glimpse into the work of

teachers and principals. The structure of the interactions and descriptions of incidents encountered during the school year is paralleled in the methodology of this research study.

Conclusion

Findings from the current research study are presented in the next three chapters: Chapter IV: The Principal's Work: A Day in the Life; Chapter V: The Principal's Work: The Annual Cycle; and Chapter VI: Analysis of Principals' Descriptions of Influences on Their Work. A review of autoethnographic data, focused interviews, and document analysis provide the basis for a narrative account of a typical young, female elementary school principal's day (i.e., A Day in the Life), which will be presented in Chapter IV. Additionally, this data was used to weave a narrative account of a young, female elementary school principal's typical year, presented as a monthly account of work-related tasks and roles (i.e., Annual Cycle of the Principalship), which will be presented in Chapter V. These narrative accounts, told by a character named *Meredith*, address the first research question, "What is the work of a young, female elementary school principal like in the early part of the twenty-first century?" Data that served as the basis for these narratives also have been separated into two distinct categories to address the remaining research questions:

1. What influence does context (e.g., legal/political, technological, and socio-cultural factors) have on the work of young, female principals?
2. What influence do individual personal experiences have on the work of young, female, principals?

Results from these findings are discussed in Chapter VI. Wolcott's ethnographic practice consisted of description, analysis, and interpretation. The subsequent chapters follow a similar format, with narrative accounts serving as descriptions of principals' work, as well as context and individual personal experiences that influence their work. The narrative accounts are then analyzed and interpreted in the context of young females practicing in the twenty-first century. Presentation and analysis of data will be included in the composite story of Meredith.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRINCIPAL'S WORK: A DAY IN THE LIFE

Nothing will work unless you do.
—Maya Angelou

“A Day in the Life” is a composite story that was constructed using raw data from the second interview conducted with each of the five research participants. The second interview asked research participants to verbally recount the previous day from the time they awoke until the time they went to bed. Participants were encouraged to keep a running list of events and encounters in an effort to make the account as accurate as possible. Three of the five participants kept a list, and the other two used their calendars to track the day.

4:45 am. First alarm goes off, Meredith is sure it can't be time to get up. She presses snooze twice and is in the shower at 5:05am. While the water is heating up, Meredith checks her BlackBerry to see if any important emails came through during the night. While showering, the list-making begins. Which meetings do I have today? Did I remember to put the parent conference in my calendar? Are materials ready for the data wall? When is the staff development plan due to central office? I wonder what we have to thaw out for dinner. Will I even be home for dinner tonight?

5:30 am. After showering, Meredith is deciding what to wear. She knows she has Rotary and a Leadership Meeting today where parents will most certainly be in

attendance, so a jacket and dress pants are probably appropriate. Her husband's alarm goes off, and his morning routine begins. She puts on her makeup and goes to wake up her son before fixing her hair. At the end of his bed, Meredith lays out two outfits for her son to choose from. She knows she doesn't want to fight a battle like yesterday morning in terms of what he will be wearing to daycare.

5:50 am. Meredith makes coffee and packs her son's lunch. Her husband will take care of fixing him breakfast. She quickly fixes her hair, making a mental note that she hasn't had a haircut in at least three months. Meredith does not spend a great deal of time focused on her own appearance. She makes sure her hairstyle is relatively low maintenance in order to save time during her morning routine. She does enjoy shopping but does not consider herself trendy by any means. During her first few years in the principalship, however, Meredith has realized that her appearance alone can have a significant impact, both positive and negative, in her work as a principal. She also realizes that she is, in fact, a Caucasian, middle class, heterosexual female, which also influences how she perceives others and how others perceive her. She sits down at the computer with a cup of coffee and sends responses to emails that she received during the night.

6:25 am. As she is walking out the door, Meredith remembers to set out dinner to thaw for later. Her husband is going to drop off their son at daycare this morning because he doesn't have to be in as early.

7:15am. Meredith arrives at school and begins preparing morning announcements. She keeps a running document on her desktop to track daily

announcements. Because classified employees cannot work over 40 hours, she answers the phone until 7:30 am, intentionally making her voice sound lower and deeper because she has been told that she sounds like a kid on the phone.

7:30 am. Meredith checks in on the students eating breakfast in the cafeteria and goes out to the car rider line to make sure traffic isn't backed up. She glances at her BlackBerry to see if any new emails have come through.

7:40 am. The fist bell rings, and Meredith stands in the back hallway, checking to make sure fifth graders are walking to classrooms appropriately. Instead of noticing students, Meredith sees that a Kindergarten teacher is running in at the last minute before students arrive, almost 20 minutes later than teachers are supposed to get to school. The teacher is obviously flustered, and Meredith nods her head, acknowledging that she knows the teacher is late and that she doesn't need an explanation right this minute.

7:50 am. Meredith does morning announcements. Students come into her office to help with the Pledge of Allegiance. She reminds staff that there is a leadership team meeting at 3pm and that hearing screenings for first, third, and fifth graders will be held in the hallway outside the speech office as scheduled. She also reminds staff members that substitute teachers will be coming in at noon for fourth-grade data meetings, which are beginning today.

8:00 am. Meredith stands in the office and informally notes the students who are still coming in late. She knows that it isn't the kids' fault and makes a note in her calendar to email the counselor to follow up with the parents of students who are late several times a week. Within her own school building, Meredith is frequently mistaken

by visitors to be a teacher, a secretary, or an office assistant. She recalls several events in which her appearance has led others to assume that she is not, in fact, the principal. One morning, Meredith remembers, a very angry parent came storming into the front office. Meredith was at the front desk because her secretary had not yet arrived. She listened to the mother's story and tried to calm her down. Meredith explained that the parent could set up a conference with the teacher in order to discuss her concerns. The mother began using profanity, and Meredith asked her to leave until she was calmed down. About an hour later, the angry parent returned. Meredith was back in her office during this time because her secretary had arrived for the day. The parent approached the front desk and asked to see the principal, and Meredith walked up the hallway. When the parent saw Meredith, she yelled, "I do NOT want to talk to that sassy secretary again! I asked for the principal!" "Ma'am, I am the principal," Meredith calmly replied.

8:15 am. Meredith sits down in her office to check email before her intervention groups begin. She opens her personnel files, notes that she still hasn't received lesson plans from her teacher who is on an action plan, and makes a note in the teacher's file who was late this morning with the time and date. She emails the teacher who was late, reminding the teacher that she is to arrive by 7:20 am every morning. She also emails her director to remind her that the controversial "Bible Bus" meeting is this afternoon at 3pm. In her email, she tells the director about the approach she plans to take with the issue and asks for any additional tips her director may have. She feels compelled to keep everyone in the loop on this situation, especially because her PTA president is the daughter of a current school board member. Meredith does some last minute preparations for her small

math group. Even though she doesn't really have time to run a group, she does miss teaching. Because she told third grade teachers she would take a math group, she has now taken on a fourth and fifth grade group, just to be equitable. So, 90 minutes a day are spent with kids working in a small group. That's too much, she knows. But it is only for six weeks. On the days she isn't there, her assistant principal and curriculum facilitator run her group. With young age also comes some credibility with certain populations of teachers. As Meredith explains her tutoring groups with third, fourth, and fifth graders, she realizes this is her way of reaching out to help and to show teachers that she still "knows how to teach." She shares with her professors in graduate school,

I think teachers have more respect for me because I'm in school. I think they are more likely to consider going back to school themselves. I think they have respect for time management and ask me how I do all of these things. I also think I have been in the classroom recently enough that they think I know what I am looking for when I come in to evaluate or even just to look around. Teachers know I know what research-based best practices are because I'm not far removed. I've been a student and a teacher recently enough to have some increased credibility that I know just from talking to teachers that not all principals have.

8:40 am. Meredith double checks the box outside her door and her email but has still not received next week's lesson plans from her teacher who is on an action plan. She walks down to the teacher's room. The teacher is seated at her table with her computer on while some students are working independently, and many others are off-task. Meredith reminds the teacher that her plans were due yesterday at 5 pm. The teacher tells Meredith that her computer wouldn't print the plans. Meredith goes to the technology teacher and asks her to help the teacher get her plans printed. While standing in the computer lab, Meredith realizes that it is at least 80 degrees. She goes back to her office and makes a

note in her calendar to schedule an unannounced observation in the teacher's room at the same time tomorrow. While she gathers her materials for small groups, Meredith picks up the phone to call maintenance about the temperature in the computer lab.

9:00 am. Meredith goes to a classroom to begin her small groups. Her secretary knows to take messages during this time. But, during her second group, she checks her BlackBerry and sees an email from the PTA president saying that she has asked some other parents to come to this afternoon's leadership meeting since they will be discussing the Bible Bus visit. Meredith cannot believe the amount of time she has spent already dealing with the Bible Bus but replies that she is looking forward to seeing the PTA president and the other parents at this afternoon's meeting. She reminds the parent that only two parent votes will be counted toward this decision because only two parents typically sit on the Leadership Team, although the committee will happily hear out anyone who would like to provide insight on the decision. As she is working on math strategies within her small group, she realizes four of the five students in her small group are Hispanic. She begins to wonder about the performance of the overall Hispanic subgroup in math and wonders if she has done enough staff development in culturally responsive teaching practices. She finishes up small groups and heads back to the office, reminding herself to pull data from the last set of benchmarks specifically for Hispanic student performance in math. On her way, she sees the maintenance guys have come to work on the air in the computer lab. Even though she knows she doesn't have time, Meredith stops and chats with them. She jokes with the maintenance guys about her school being their favorite even though she realizes that she is probably playing the "girl

card.” As she walks away, she notes that she doesn’t really care if she is playing the “girl card” if she is able to get her school what it needs as efficiently as possible.

10:30 am. Meredith returns to her office and realizes she is starving. She tells herself she must start eating more of a breakfast and grabs a pack of crackers from her desk drawer. She also makes a note to visit K-2 classrooms tomorrow morning. Since she has been doing intervention groups, she sees lots of 3-5 classrooms and doesn’t want to miss out on what is happening in K-2. She has 15 unread emails, and spends a few minutes replying to emails from different departments at central office. It seems like she has sent the same email to every single department at least once and wonders why departments don’t appear to communicate with one another. She makes a note in her calendar to attend next week’s school board meeting. She doesn’t go to every board meeting but tries to go when she can because it is a good place to be seen and to see what priorities are being discussed for the month.

11:00 am. Meredith has protected office time for one hour. She puts protected office time on the staff Google calendar. This lets staff know that she is at school but is working on a task that requires some uninterrupted office time. Meredith leaves her door open while she works on the personnel allotment from central office. Her secretary comes in and asks her to sign the monthly financial report. Meredith asks her secretary how she is doing, fully aware that her secretary has been considering retirement for some time and hoping that she will wait at least one more year. They talk for about 15 minutes and then Meredith hears a sick child in the office. She goes out to call the parent and to make sure the child has a trash can. The curriculum facilitator comes in and asks for the remaining

materials needed for the data meetings. Meredith walks down the hall and makes sure all the materials are ready. She returns to her office and prints the agendas for the data meeting. Meredith lets her curriculum facilitator know that she will have to leave the data meeting at 12:45pm for Rotary Club.

12:00 pm. Fourth-grade teachers meet in the conference room for their data meeting. Meredith explains the purpose of the meeting is to plan strategic, targeted small group instruction for reading and math for the last nine weeks of school. She explains the process of using formal and informal pieces of data to make the best plan possible for each individual student. Her veteran teachers seem very hesitant to share their kids with other teachers, while the newer teachers are anxious to ability group across the grade level. Meredith explains the purpose and the research behind skill-based grouping in reading and math and assures her veteran teachers that they will analyze the data to see if the groups are working at the end of the quarter. She asks the curriculum facilitator if she can take over and then rushes to the restroom to freshen up before the Rotary meeting.

1:00 pm. Today, Meredith gets to eat lunch because she has Rotary Club. Rotary is a group of community leaders that meets once a month and has key speakers. The meeting is short- she is always in and out in an hour and back to school in plenty of time for dismissal. Today's meeting is a community speaker talking about the importance of creating opportunities for students when they leave high school. She is mistaken for one of the high school students by a Rotary member, who quickly apologizes, but continues to focus on how young she looks. Meredith made a note in her calendar to apply for a field trip grant provided by Target for students at her school to visit college campuses.

2:20 pm. When Meredith returns to school, she has a BlackBerry message from another principal who wants her help with his personnel allotment, there is a discipline referral for a Kindergarten student in her box, and the PTA president is waiting to speak with her in the office before the Leadership Meeting begins. Meredith tells the PTA president that she will have to handle the discipline incident and do afternoon dismissal before she can meet with her. The PTA president says she understands and she will just discuss her concerns at the meeting itself. Meredith walks down to the Kindergarten classroom where the child is in trouble and asks him to pack his book bag. The child begins crying but willingly walks with Meredith. She talks to him as they walk about good choices and bad choices. When they get to the office, Meredith calls the boy's dad, explaining that there will be consequences at school for disrupting the learning of others and asking if they have any suggestions for strategies that work at home with similar behaviors. The dad assures Meredith that he will handle the situation at home this evening. She thanks the parent for his support, fills out the bottom portion of the discipline referral form, places a copy in the teacher's box and sends the original home with the child in his book bag. Meredith also reflects on how becoming a mother has impacted the way she makes decisions. She spends time every day thinking, "Is this what I want for my own child? Do I want a teacher speaking to my child that way? If this were my child, what lesson would I want him to learn from this?" Her leadership approach has changed since becoming a mother. As she shares with another female principal, "Once I had a child, it was more about every individual child. Not about the school as a whole as much, just about what is best for each student." Meredith heads out to car rider dismissal.

She notices a teacher who looks very pale and asks her if she feels okay. The teacher says she's been feeling pretty bad all day, and Meredith tells her that she will cover her duty and to go home and rest. The teacher is worried about missing Leadership, and Meredith tells her that she will find someone to cover. Meredith finishes car duty and finds another second-grade teacher to come to Leadership. She runs in her office, prints the Leadership Meeting agendas, and checks her email to see if her director responded with any additional suggestions for handling the meeting. Her director's email says, "I know you will do a great job with this. Call if you need anything." Meredith rolls her eyes, and heads to the library for the meeting.

3:00 pm. Leadership Meeting—The room is exceptionally quiet when Meredith enters. Teachers seem a bit uncomfortable because there are more parents there than usual. The Bible Bus issue is really about a group wanting to have parent permission to take children off campus during school, provide a brief "non-denominational" bible study lesson, and give each student a bible. The parents in attendance look as if they are unified and battle-ready. Meredith wonders if she's done enough to prepare herself and her teachers for this meeting. At last month's meeting, the Leadership Team agreed that they could do the Bible Bus if it could be done after school hours, preventing students from missing instructional time. Meredith contacted the Bible Bus director and found out that it could only be done during school hours. The purpose of this month's Leadership Meeting is to take a final vote on the Bible Bus issue, to gain feedback on this year's schedule, and to discuss personnel allotment possibilities. Meredith starts the meeting by handing out meeting agendas and welcoming guests. She makes sure everyone knows

that the meeting will end by 5 o'clock, anticipating that the debate could be endless if she doesn't establish some boundaries in advance. After opening the floor for discussion, the parents obviously stand on the side of allowing the Bible Bus and the teachers strongly oppose it if it is going to take away from instructional time, which is also a non-negotiable for her as well. Meredith lets the committee know that they will be taking a blind vote, to be tallied by the Leadership Team secretary and a parent representative. Although both arguments are strong, everyone maintains a professional tone and attitude. A parent expresses a valid concern that there are more teachers than parents on the committee, which will automatically sway the vote. Meredith is careful not to talk too much during this debate and is very aware of her body language. She expresses to the Leadership Team that they are charged with making decisions in the best interest of students and that they should be careful to let a touchy issue such as this one deter them from their vision or divide them as a group. After votes are collected, Meredith moves to the next agenda item. The PTA president leaves abruptly, and Meredith briefly worries that she is on her way to contact the local news. She takes a deep breath and leads the remainder of the meeting, which is considerably less controversial than the first portion. The Leadership Team agrees that using Title I money to preserve teaching positions is necessary in terms of allotment decisions. Each Leadership member takes a schedule feedback form to gather input from their respective groups on suggestions for the following year's schedule. The meeting is adjourned just before 5pm, and the secretary and parent representative stay behind to count the votes. The secretary will include the tally in the minutes, which she will email to all Leadership Team members tomorrow.

5:00 pm. Meredith looks at tomorrow's calendar and checks her box for messages. She gets out the backpacks for the food program to send home with students tomorrow (Friday) afternoon for the weekend. She thinks of a new family that may need the program and emails her social worker to check on this. When she looks at her BlackBerry, she sees several new email messages that she will have to check from home tonight before she goes to bed. She thinks to herself that she must have looked at her BlackBerry at least 50-60 times today and wonders to herself if this is too much or not enough.

5:45 pm. Meredith calls her husband to tell him she is leaving work. He says he is at the daycare picking up their son and will meet her at home. As she is putting her computer in her book bag, a teacher's assistant knocks on her office door. Meredith tells her to come in and says she hopes she hasn't been here waiting since she is supposed to leave by 3:20pm each afternoon. The assistant says she left a long time ago but saw her car was still here and thought she could come in for just a minute to ask her something. Meredith can tell the assistant is nervous, explains that of course she can talk to her for a few minutes, but she will have to head home soon. The teacher assistant starts by telling Meredith that she has had some problems at home with her husband being faithful, explains that he wants to take her on a trip, and asks Meredith what she thinks. Meredith tells the assistant that it is completely fine to take the days off for the trip. The teacher assistant replies that she appreciates that but really wants to know if Meredith thinks she should go on the trip or not. Meredith quickly realizes that this conversation is not about a request for time off, but instead, the assistant is asking for Meredith's opinion in terms

of marital advice. She tells the assistant that she is sure she is in a hard situation and needs to make a decision based on what she feels is best for her and her family. She reminds the assistant what a good person she is and tells her that she deserves the absolute best. The assistant thanks Meredith for her time and support.

Navigating the line between boss and friend can also serve as difficult territory for young female leaders. Meredith tries very hard not to cross that line, boss versus friend, but admits that she has found herself in some gray areas—

Being young and female creates a very lonely position since you cannot cross that line of professionalism and friendship or personal relationships in the workplace, and that's kind of what will sometimes happen. And my husband has even said when you stay somewhere too long, you develop friendships, and that's just the girl part of me sometime.

Meredith texts her husband that she is leaving work 20 minutes later than she had originally thought. She knows that he will understand but feels bad for getting home later than planned and realizes that this happens several times a week.

6:50 pm. Meredith arrives home, asks her son about his day, and begins fixing dinner. She and her husband discuss the Bible Bus issue. He asks her about plans for the weekend, and she says she needs one day for graduate school work, and they can save Sunday for family day. They will have date night on Friday while Meredith's mother watches their son.

7:30 pm. Meredith intentionally leaves her BlackBerry in the bathroom so she doesn't look at it during dinner. She puts in a load of laundry before they begin eating. Meredith's role as wife and mother and principal often leave her struggling to find a

balance between work and home. Her perfectionist tendencies often result in her need to be in control at all times. She tells her husband,

So much energy goes into being an active listener at work and thinking through all these issues and juggling this, and this, and this. I mean, I can multitask all day at work all day long and not feel like it's a major problem; but when I get home, I don't want to do that. I don't want to be juggling fifteen things at one time. But by the nature of any parent and wife and professional, I still have to juggle and I get frustrated sometimes. So I don't always take the time to sit down and listen. I just say this is how we need to do it.

8:15 pm. While her husband cleans up dinner dishes, Meredith gives her son a bath and reads him a book before putting him to bed.

8:45 pm. Meredith gets a glass of wine and sits down on the couch with her computer. She opens up the personnel allotment and completes a draft. She sends it to two friends that work at central office to get some preliminary feedback. She makes a note in her calendar to return the message from the other principal first thing in the morning.

9:30 pm. Meredith gets ready for bed and picks out an outfit to wear tomorrow. Even though it is technically dress-down day, she doesn't wear jeans on Fridays. She puts her BlackBerry on "BlackBerry calls-Ring only," turns on the television, and goes immediately to sleep.

4:45 am. Seven short hours later, the cycle begins again ...

CHAPTER V

THE PRINCIPAL'S WORK: THE ANNUAL CYCLE

Learn to lead without using the power of your position to do so.
—Dr. Randy Bridges, Former Superintendent of Alamance-Burlington School System

The “Annual Cycle” is a composite account of Meredith’s work from June of one school year through May of the following school year. Interview data, along with excerpts from principals’ calendars were used to construct each month’s events. Events presented in the account were either addressed by more than one participant within the research study or were feasible events that could have easily occurred during the course of each principal’s school year.

June

Meredith is somewhat relaxed when she drives to work on Monday morning in the third week of June. Even though she has a lot to do, there is something more low-key about work once teachers have left for the summer. Even her dress reflects the change of pace. Unless she has meetings during the summer, she feels comfortable in dressy jeans, something she would never wear during the school year. Meredith also feels like she has time to be more reflective during the second half of June. At school, the only other 12-month employees are the school secretary and custodians. The slower pace is refreshing, and she has a chance to get caught up, even though she knows this opportunity is brief.

In June, Meredith meets with the PTA president and her secretary to come up with the fundraiser for next school year. 30-50 sales representatives contact her every year trying to plead their case, and those are only the sales reps that manage to squeak by her secretary to get to her. Overall, there must be thousands of sales reps that hustle to be selected as the elementary school fundraiser. They select the fundraiser they are going to go with for the following school year and agree on the rollout dates. Meredith's secretary then contacts the fundraising company and brings Meredith the contract to sign once the company sends it.

Class rolls are something Meredith spends a great deal of time working on during June. Before teachers leave for the summer, they use blue and pink cards with some brief academic, social, and other pertinent information to make their own version of class rolls for the following grade levels' teachers. While she does not allow parents to make specific teacher requests, she does accept letters from parents that describe the type of classroom in which they feel their child will be most successful. Parents are not permitted to use teacher names in these letters, and the letters must be received in the office no later than June 15th. Meredith finds it interesting to see what teachers have to say about their students on the pink and blue cards. She realizes how much teachers do know about students. Some teachers have written short novels on the 4x6 piece of card stock, and some have filled out the bare minimum. Meredith reviews what the teachers have put together and makes several adjustments based on her own information. She knows how important it is to make the best instructional match for teachers and students and spends a great deal of time finalizing class rolls.

At the June principals' meeting, there is always a sense of healthy competition in the air. Principals know their own test scores by this point, but they are unaware of where they stand in comparison to everyone else. Depending on their comfort level, principals choose whether or not to participate in informal conversations regarding how their school stands. The accountability director shares preliminary data at the meeting, and there is typically a collective sigh of relief as principals realize that their schools performed basically in line with everyone else. Within moments, the uneasiness returns when principals learn that they will not learn whether their schools made AYP until late July. This is always the case, but the sense of urgency in June exists as principals know that if their schools did not reach 100% of targets, they did not make AYP. The meeting finishes with reminders regarding new technology availability for school purchases and updates for scheduling summative principal evaluations.

Meredith is scheduled for her final observation turn-in during the second half of June. She has a folder prepared with the different levels of documentation for new teachers, career staff, growth plans, classified employees, and staff with performance concerns. The personnel office goes through each person's name to ensure that Meredith has completed the appropriate documentation for each staff member.

For the remaining days in June, Meredith makes sure she has submitted her leave requests for the vacation days she plans to take in the summer. She compiles a list of staff shirt sizes and talks to some teachers about the kind of shirts they would like to have for the following school year. Meredith makes sure that a supply list for each grade level has been sent to the local Office Max, Wal-Mart, and Office Depot stores. She walks the

building and makes a list of work orders that need to be submitted to the maintenance department.

Meredith schedules a time for files of fifth graders to be delivered to the middle school. While she has a teacher that takes the files, Meredith likes to contact the middle school principal before the files are delivered. She worries whether students classified as Exceptional Children (EC) are going to receive the appropriate modifications and services once they enter the middle school setting. Meredith is frustrated when the only response from the middle school principal is to question which of the EC students were frequent behavior problems.

Because the state budget has not yet been passed, Meredith does not know how many vacancies she will have to fill before school starts. However, she assembles an interview panel based on her current staff and finds dates when the panel will be able to interview over the summer, assuming vacancies do indeed arise. She also meets with one teacher who had put her name on the transfer list because she thought she may want to try teaching middle school. Meredith explains that the central office will not be doing anything with teachers on the transfer list until a state budget is passed. The teacher says she understands and that she is not sure she wants to leave anyway, but she thinks she may have more control of her curriculum if she moves to the middle school.

July

On July 1st, the last day possible, the state finally passes a budget. Meredith realizes this means that personnel allotments and budget items will be due with a quick turnaround. These circumstances have been the same for two consecutive years, since the

economy's rapid decline. Unfortunately, Meredith's annual family vacation is the week of July 4th, and she often worries a great deal about what she will miss in terms of budget-related issues while she is away. In fact, she realizes minutes before it is time to leave for the airport that she has misplaced her laptop cord. She goes into a minor panic, checking the bedroom, the kitchen, the living room for the missing cord. Finally, relieved, she finds it in her car. Meredith always travels with her BlackBerry and laptop, so she is able to stay connected. As usual, she gets a call on her cell phone from the Director of Elementary Education during the week of July 4th with her final allotment numbers. Meredith really does not mind getting this information while she is away and is glad her director feels comfortable calling her. As she enjoys her last days of vacation, Meredith reflects on the changes she will make given the new and reduced budget circumstances.

Upon her return, Meredith begins to feel the pressure of how quickly August will come and teachers will be returning. She schedules an allotment meeting with central office to finalize vacancies and determine which positions she will be able to pay for using Title I funding. Following her allotment meeting, Meredith contacts her staff interview panel to schedule interviews for existing vacancies. She sorts through the hundreds of emails she has received from potential candidates and thinks about how difficult it has become for teachers to get jobs in just the few short years since she left the classroom. Meredith and her interview panel spend about two weeks interviewing candidates, checking references, and making recommendations. Although it is time consuming, Meredith never rushes in making hiring decisions. After going through the

turmoil of dismissing teachers, she feels that finding the best match for her school is worth all the time in the world. Luckily, the teachers on her interview panel often share the same sentiments, and the panel very rarely disagrees on the best choice for each position.

Meredith's director and superintendent come to her school in July for her summative evaluation. They sit down in her office to review last year's goals and the progress she has made towards each goal. They discuss her school's proficiency and growth data and offer compliments related to progress in these areas. While her evaluations are always good, Meredith often wishes they would tell her specifically what they would like to see. She currently sets her own goals and documents her own progress. When they come for her evaluation, they read over what she has written and sign off. They spend a brief amount of time going over responses from the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, and Meredith is thankful that they have pulled in some kind of external measure in terms of data sources to include. They thank her for another good year and tell her they look forward to what next year has in store. Meredith wants her evaluation to be the best and often wishes for more tangible feedback than she receives.

Meredith begins looking at schedule feedback from the Leadership Team based on last year's schedule. She knows that the schedule is going to look different this year due to implementation of school-wide intervention, as part of the Response to Intervention (RtI) process but has not yet determined how this will look. RtI is the newly adopted framework for providing early research-based interventions for academics and behavior to prevent overidentification of students qualifying for special education

services. She buys a book with a CD on Creative Elementary School Scheduling, with the hopes that this will help in developing the school-wide schedule. Writing the schedule is one of Meredith's least favorite tasks, and she calls in some teacher leaders for assistance with the process.

Before the end of the month, Meredith schedules Leadership, RtI, and School Improvement Plan (SIP) team meetings for the first week in August. She edits last year's student, parent, staff, and daycare handbooks. She gets ready to send the handbooks to the print shop and then changes her mind by deciding that this year, she will use instructional funds to buy each teacher a USB flash drive rather than paying to have the 84-page handbook printed for every staff member. Staff members will then be able to use the USB drive to back up their own computers, store documents such as report cards, etc. Meredith knows that her older staff members may need help with this but is confident that it is the right decision.

Meredith sets two days aside to meet with her secretary and NC Wise data manager, who is responsible for tracking student attendance among other clerical duties, to develop a list of needed instructional supplies for the following school year. Before Meredith came to this school, the data manager and secretary did all the ordering on their own. They are grateful that Meredith likes to be a part of this process, but Meredith knows they will disagree some on "needed" items. An example of this is when the data manager lists that they need 20 boxes of transparencies. Meredith points out that they no longer need to order any transparencies since every class has a SmartBoard and overhead projectors are all but obsolete within the school building. Meredith makes a note in her

calendar to have all overheads discarded before teachers return as this will also assist in terminating dated instructional practices. She knows that a few teachers will be disappointed in the disappearance of the overhead projectors. However, she has allotted instructional dollars to equip each classroom with a SmartBoard and hopes this will compensate. After completing the instructional supply order, Meredith reminds her secretary that she will be gone the following week to systemwide literacy training.

Before leaving, Meredith receives a phone call from a local church that wants to provide a Free Market for families in need of school supplies. Meredith sets up a meeting with the church and thinks about how to advertise the market to parents in a nonintrusive manner. She receives an email from the Accountability Director, indicating that her school made AYP in all target groups for the school year. Meredith is very excited about this news as she was worried about the performance of her Economically Disadvantaged subgroup. She intentionally helps build parents' knowledge of school-related matters without infringing upon how parents are raising their children. For example, Meredith shares with parents the importance of students memorizing their math facts. While confidentiality prevents Meredith from knowing which students are classified as Economically Disadvantaged, she uses data collected from the previous year that shows that this particular subgroup is the most at-risk for lower levels of proficiency in comparison to their non-Economically Disadvantaged peers. To close this gap, she mandated small group instruction in reading and math in grades K-5 in to target students at their instructional level. Other research-based practices at Meredith's school include

using manipulatives, building schema, and using ongoing formative assessments to drive weekly instruction.

She gathers all drafts of the master schedule to take with her to work on during the literacy training. Meredith often gets very bored at trainings and wonders when they are going to start practicing what they preach in terms of making professional development opportunities as engaging for adults as they want classrooms to be for students.

August

With a turn of the page in her calendar from July to August, Meredith feels a renewed sense of urgency as she knows parents, students, and teachers will soon be filling the vacant hallways and classrooms. August 1st itself marks an important day in the life of a new school year. Meredith makes it a point to mail out information regarding the start of the school year to parents, students, and staff members on August 1st. This includes welcome back postcards to students and welcome back letters for staff members. The student card gives families important information for the start of the school year and indicates the assigned classroom teacher for the upcoming year. The letter to welcome staff members contains class rolls, schedules, and times and dates for beginning of the year meetings. Meredith has learned the importance of sending both welcome letters on the same day, so that parents and teachers and students can call one another and everyone has equitable access to information for the upcoming school year. Meredith is aware that she will receive several phone calls from parents regarding the student post cards, either requesting a different teacher or complaining about the new school start time. She is

prepared for this and sticks strongly to her policy of not changing classroom assignments once letters have been mailed. While she knows the schedule and class rolls are as good as they are going to be, the “mail-out” date makes everything official and therefore is accompanied with some stress for Meredith during the first few days in August.

At home, Meredith’s family understands that August and May are the months she considers her busy season. She goes from the 10 hours a day, 4 days a week schedule in July to the 11-12 hour a day, 5-6 days a week schedule in August. She remains grateful that she has such a strong support network both at home and work. Within the first few weeks of August, Meredith hosts the first Leadership and PTA Meetings of the school year. These meetings are always very positive and optimistic as they plan events for the year including, overnight field trips, Spring Fling, Open House, and Family Nights. At PTA, Meredith always requests that PTA give newly hired teachers a check for \$100. The PTA always is happy to do this as a welcome gift to new teachers. Meredith explains that new teachers often spend a great deal of their own money buying items to prepare their classrooms, and that they actually work for three weeks before receiving their first paycheck, due to the state salary schedule. The Leadership Team shares concerns with the intervention block in the new schedule, and Meredith has been anticipating this issue. Daily intervention time is a new component of Response to Intervention (RtI), a nationally-supported method of using early intervention strategies to target at-risk students. Students who are not at-risk receive enrichment in reading or math during this time; however, most resources for the intervention block are geared towards students who are struggling with reading. Meredith and the rest of the Leadership Team develop

strategies and a timeline for implementing the RtI intervention block, and this seems to be a resolved issue for the time being.

Meredith spends the days in August in meetings at school and at central office. The annual Leadership Retreat is the central office version of an annual opening staff meeting for principals and assistant principals. The meeting begins with a message from the superintendent including a celebration of the past year's successes and goals for the year ahead. Meredith enjoys hearing this message from the superintendent; however, the sessions that follow are merely information downloads from each department at the central office that could just as easily be shared in an email. When she listens to some of the presentations, she wonders how some of these people ever arrived in their current leadership positions. However, she is careful to take notes and thinks to herself that she is grateful this meeting only occurs once each school year. Early August evenings find Meredith at her computer, spending a great deal of time finalizing her presentation for the Opening Staff Meeting. Indeed, this is one of Meredith's favorite times of the school year, and she considers it her "show," so to speak. She makes sure that her presentation is accompanied by a catered lunch, new staff shirts that indicate the theme for the school year, and some type of technological innovation that has come to be expected by her staff. She recognizes that this is her opportunity to leave a positive first impression while making sure staff members feel valued. Meredith's personal goals include leading a school that is a good place to work while maintaining high expectations for everyone. This year she is choosing to give staff members a USB port in lieu of a staff handbook. She knows this will intimidate some of the veteran staff members that are less tech-

savvy, but the amount of money she is saving on printing costs will make the learning curve well worth it.

Transition meetings for EC students entering Kindergarten are held in the first weeks of August. Meredith carefully reviews IEPs and notes characteristics of students and parents before deciding on classroom assignments for these students. Because these have been labeled with a learning disability, speech impairment, or most frequently, developmentally delayed, before entering Kindergarten, Meredith realizes that building relationships with these students and their families is especially important.

A local church contacts Meredith to see if they can provide a welcome back refreshment for teachers accompanied with a good luck message for the beginning of the school year. Meredith explains that this gesture is greatly appreciated. She is careful to explain to the church members that the “message” that is religious needs to be set up at the end of a table for teachers to choose to pick up if they wish to do so. When Meredith first arrived at the school, she was surprised to find religious messages placed in teachers’ boxes and was quick to notify the church of appropriate procedures for sharing information with staff members due to church-state boundaries.

Open House is held the night before school starts. Parents and students fill the building to visit teachers’ classrooms. Meredith is pleased with the turnout and spends the evening greeting parents, checking in on new teachers, and making mental notes of families that may need help with school supplies. This year, Meredith also focuses on encouraging parents to fill out free and reduced lunch applications. She knows that this can often be a pride issue for parents, but she knows the economy has taken a toll on the

community and wants parents to know it is okay to ask for help. Due to state confidentiality law, Meredith is not permitted to know which students qualify for free or reduced lunch, which makes this process even more difficult. At 7pm on the night of Open House, Meredith makes an announcement for parents to make their way to the exit doors. She has found that parents and students will stay forever if permitted. She reminds parents of the start time for school the following day and then walks the hallways, turning off lights, and locking up the building.

The remaining days in August are the first days of school. Meredith spends her time dealing with bus route issues, checking on new teachers, and writing her Title I plan. Because the state budget was passed July 1, she is having to quickly turn around her Title I plan. She shares the Title I Plan with the School Improvement Team at their first meeting. The team reads over goals and makes sure Title I funding aligns with goals before signing off. Meredith is pleased with the new School Improvement Plan process, as it has made planning and aligning resources more strategic and intentional than in previous years. The School Improvement Team includes parents and teacher representatives who meet monthly and use a SmartBoard to track student data and form goal statements. Before the end of the month, Meredith submits her School Improvement Plan to central office and asks for any preliminary feedback directors may have before the plan goes before the board in September.

Meredith is pleased with the smooth opening of the school year. Once students are back in the building, days begin flying by. She is always amazed when she begins announcements at 7:50am and it really feels like only seconds pass before it is time for

students to go home. During the first few days, she submits her school safety plan and conducts the first fire drill. After only a few days of school, Meredith realizes how tired teachers and students are and looks forward to the long Labor Day weekend.

September

September is the month of due dates for Meredith's staff members. Teachers turn in emergency sub plans, finalized detailed classroom schedules, and field trip requests. Meredith spends a great deal of time reviewing these plans and providing feedback. She begins classroom walkthroughs in September and knows this is when she needs to identify and document potential personnel concerns. She meets frequently with her curriculum facilitator to discuss teacher performance and to ensure that teachers have all needed materials.

The school fundraiser is also held in September. The fundraiser kickoff assembly is one of Meredith's least favorite school-wide events. She has a difficult time handling loss of instructional time for fundraising opportunities. However, she knows that this is the only school fundraiser that she will have to endure for the remainder of the school year. Luckily, her secretary handles systems and routines for fundraiser management, so Meredith is able to focus on teaching and learning.

In previous years, third graders were exposed to their first standardized test in early September. Based on the state accountability model, third grade students are required to pass the end of grade test in order to meet gateway standards for promotion. The pretest was used in previous years to predict students' chances of passing the end of grade test and as a growth measure to demonstrate progress during the third grade year.

Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, the state has eliminated the third grade pretest that happens in September. In terms of accountability, this is a hardship because third graders no longer count towards growth measures, and there is a decrease in validity of predicted scores at the state level with one less performance measure. However, the system has developed a local formative assessment for third graders to serve as a pretest for third grade content. This test also gives students an opportunity to bubble on a multiple-choice answer sheet and participate in testing protocol for the first time. Meredith works hard to help teachers understand that testing is a school-wide responsibility. During weeks of testing, no specials or recess time occurs for non-tested grade levels until an announcement is made that testing is complete. This is difficult for some teachers who do not understand why the school has to essentially shut down for testing. Meredith spends a great deal of time explaining that while testing is a hardship, it is a reality of their job in twenty-first century schools, and teachers and administrators are obligated to provide the best testing environment possible for students. Meredith usually includes this type of information in her weekly agendas, a weekly email newsletter that is sent every Sunday to share updates and reminders with staff members. Additional third grade testing is conducted in September by the gifted program. The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAt) is given to third graders to serve as a pre-screening measure for identifying gifted students. Students who score in the 85th percentile on the CogAt will take the IOWA in the spring to determine eligibility for Academic/Intellectually Gifted (AIG) services for fourth and fifth grade. Meredith meets with the AIG committee to discuss parent and teacher AIG referrals and to discuss results from CogAt testing.

In addition to the regular school week, several school events are held on Saturdays during the month of September. PTA beautification hosts its first campus clean-up day on the second Saturday, the PE teacher holds a punt, pass, and kick clinic on the third Saturday, and the S school reunion is held on the last Saturday of the month. Meredith attends all three events. While she does not stay for the entire day, she is supportive of each event and thinks it is important to be visible. She is exceptionally pleased with the recent turnout at PTA events and has set a personal goal for increasing parent and community involvement. The punt, pass, and kick event is part of a grant that Meredith's PE teacher is writing for the school. Increased turnout has included Economically Disadvantaged families, which Meredith attributes to having no-cost events later in the evening, so that more parents are able to attend. Several teachers have taken the initiative to write grants recently. Meredith has been happy to assist with these efforts and credits the leadership and advocacy components of the new teacher evaluation process for pushing teachers to take on this responsibility. The S school reunion is an annual event held each September. Before becoming an elementary school, S was the local high school in this part of the county. Each year, S high school graduates come to the cafeteria to share a meal and nostalgic stories. Since becoming principal, Meredith has attended the reunion each year to give an update on the state of the school as it is today. This event is always interesting as some of the high school graduates from the old school are between 80 and 90 years old, and many are deceased. Even though many of the graduates have met Meredith numerous times, they often do not remember who she is and always talk about how young she is. "We never had a principal that looked like that.

If we did, I'd get sent to the office all the time-" is an example of the type of remarks Meredith often hears at the reunion.

Students turn in required office paperwork during September, including student information cards. Meredith spends time looking through custody agreement paperwork and making sure that the paperwork aligns with what has been indicated on the student information cards. She finds that many parents who had temporary agreements have let their custody papers expire and asks her counselor to contact legal guardians for updated custody paperwork. Meredith also realizes when reviewing student information cards that some parents who were separated last year have reunited over the summer and makes a note for the school social worker to check in with these students.

ACE (a local organization that supports public education) visits Meredith's school during the month of September to give dictionaries to third graders. This is a locally sponsored program that is often covered by news media. Meredith usually facilitates this event in the cafeteria. Meredith spends many days in September at meetings and required staff development sessions. Throughout the month, she is out of the building a total of 5 days. Trainings include Literacy First, a new framework for the school system focused on explicit phonics instruction, monthly curriculum meetings, and Balanced Leadership, a leadership framework developed by McRel focused on the 21 responsibilities of an effective leader. Meredith is often bitter when she attends these meetings, wondering how effective she can possibly be when she is not in her building. She also takes careful note of which principals arrive late at trainings and meetings and which principals do not come at all. As a relatively new principal, only in her third year, Meredith is careful to

respond positively to all leaders at the district level, regardless of her personal sentiments about the seemingly excessive meeting schedule.

October

October begins with Fall Picture Day and hearing/vision screenings for students. Meredith tries to schedule these events as early in the month as possible because the remainder of October is busy with formative assessments and data meetings. Meredith has realized that having a detailed schedule for everything helps in protecting instructional time. She wonders if her Type A personality is resented or appreciated by the majority of staff members but concludes it is better to have too much information and structure than not enough. She sends out a weekly and monthly calendar, outlining events and schedules for each day that has a listed event. Perhaps this is more for her own sanity than that of anyone else.

During October, Meredith conducts the first round of formal teacher observations. Observations are announced and are scheduled to last for 40 minutes, although Meredith typically stays for an hour in order to see transitions. Since her first year as principal, Meredith has non-renewed and/or encouraged four teachers to resign. She has developed a reputation for having a willingness to dismiss staff if they are not performing according to expectations. Several dismissals have required outside observations conducted by the Human Resources department. While this process has been difficult, Meredith stands by her decisions and her documentation of substandard performance. Since dismissing those teachers, Meredith's staff has become more effective and this progress has been evident in student achievement measures.

Within five days of each observation, Meredith meets with teachers for a post-conference to discuss the observation. The new teacher evaluation process is an adjustment for both Meredith and her teachers, as teachers have the opportunity to produce evidence for standards that were not necessarily observed during the observation. Meredith likes components of the new process but is grateful that she addressed her most serious personnel issues while the old evaluation model was still being utilized.

Shadow a Principal Day is a day where principals and local business leaders spend time shadowing one another. The superintendent encourages this event, and the local business owner comes to school to shadow Meredith, and Meredith spends the second half of the day shadowing the business owner. While the idea is good in theory, Meredith often wonders about the real intended purpose. The business leaders get to Meredith's school at 9am, after Meredith's day has been going for two hours. At noon, they leave to have lunch, an abnormality for Meredith, and she spends the remainder of the afternoon shadowing the business owner. If nothing else, the Shadow a Principal concept reinforces Meredith's notion that no one has a clear understanding about the real work of school principals.

The honeymoon period of the new school year has worn off by mid-October. Students and teachers are comfortable with routines, and student discipline typically picks up. Meredith spends more time during October, February, and May dealing with student discipline than she does during other months in the school year. This is most likely due to high stress levels and extended periods of time without a break. Meredith wonders if this trend is the same for year-round schools. Several schools in her district

have gone to the year-round schedule in recent years, and she often thinks this would be an improvement over the traditional calendar. Meredith spends most of her discipline handling time in October with one particular student, who is new to her school. He is a first grader who literally shuts down, crying and screaming when he is presented with a task that he does not want to complete. Meredith sets up a parent-teacher conference with the school counselor and contacts the school the student attended last year. She refers the student to RTI for behavior and asks the school psychologist to complete a functional behavior assessment.

During the end of October, 3rd-5th graders complete the first round of formative assessments in reading, math, and science. Science is a relatively new component of the accountability standards, and Meredith and her staff have spent a great deal of time and resources attempting to improve science scores. Each year, Meredith feels more confident with her own understanding of the ABC and AYP measures as they relate to state and federal accountability models. She encourages her staff to use data to drive daily instruction. At the end of each quarter, Meredith holds half-day data meetings with each grade level. Data meetings provide an opportunity to look at individual student data in order to make instructional decisions. This year, Meredith has teachers focusing on targeted small group instruction in reading and math. Teachers identify needed skills and share students across the grade level to target students at their instructional levels. Some teachers resist this concept while others embrace it. Meredith is hopeful that end of year data will support this instructional method. Deciding which teachers will have which students for small groups often creates tension among teachers; Meredith has set the

standard that student data is to be shared by all teachers in order to make informed decisions. She spends lots of time telling teachers that no longer does a teacher have her own students; instead, every student and his or her progress or lack thereof is the responsibility of the entire school. In addition, specialists (including the PE teacher, music teacher, art teacher, receptionist, and even the custodian) are being utilized during small group instruction. Meredith attends each data meeting and serves as a facilitator during the small group instruction design process. She knows that sharing students is not comfortable for all teachers but also knows the research behind effective ability grouping practices.

At the end of the month, Meredith prepares teachers for a lockdown drill. While lockdown drills have become routine, they are always a source of stress for teachers. During the drill, staff members act as if an intruder has entered the building. They lock their classroom doors, turn off the lights, and move to the interior of the classroom, sliding a green paper under the door to indicate everything in the classroom is okay. Meredith does not spend a lot of time worrying about what would happen if there was an actual need for a school lockdown. She knows there is a plan in place and tries to make the drill as low-stress as possible for teachers and students.

At the end of October, Meredith always comments on how quickly the first nine weeks have passed. A teacher workday is held for teachers to hold parent report card conferences. Meredith makes sure she is available to sit in on any conferences that have the potential to become controversial as she has encouraged teachers to be honest with parents of students who are not performing on grade level. RtI and Individual Education

Plan (IEP) meetings are also held in conjunction with parent conferences. Students with academic and behavior concerns are Meredith's focus for these meetings, and she makes an effort to attend every meeting possible during this time.

November

Election Day always presents a unique set of circumstances for Meredith, especially during years of a presidential election. The school gym is used as a voting site, and Election Day has also been a school day for several consecutive years. Certain restrooms have to be partitioned off for public use, and Meredith has to be careful to keep school safety procedures in place while public voting occurs in the gym. The handicap accessibility for voters also becomes an issue during arrival and dismissal. While she is pleased that the school can be used for community events, Meredith also has to carefully think through all possible incidents on Election Day. Polls open early and stay open late. Rather than giving a key to a community member in charge of the election, Meredith chooses to stay from start to finish, just to be sure she is available should anything go wrong.

The end of each nine weeks is recognized with an awards assembly, usually during the first few days in November. Assemblies consist of recognition of students for academic performance, outstanding character, and perfect attendance. Many parents attend awards assemblies and have thanked Meredith for holding them. However, as Meredith notes the parents in attendance, she realizes the assemblies are not widely attended across all socio-cultural groups and the same parents always seem to attend. She wonders about ways to overcome factors that may prevent all parents from being able to

attend, including parents who do not have transportation to get to the school, parents who do not have childcare for other siblings, and whether parents are able to understand and receive phone calls. While assemblies are not Meredith's favorite way to consume the instructional day, she does think it is important to recognize student accomplishments throughout the school year. Typically, the perfect attendance awards are contested by at least a few parents. Parents receive a copy of the attendance policy in the student handbook and sign that they have reviewed the policy within the first few weeks of school. However, there are always some parents who come to Meredith and her data manager following the awards assemblies angry because their children did not receive perfect attendance. Meredith calmly pulls a copy of the student handbook out of the closet and explains that perfect attendance means zero absences and up to two excused tardies or early checkouts. Student attendance is something that Meredith monitors closely and is a matter with which she is willing to be firm with parents. High stakes testing has raised the bar for student attendance. Since her arrival, Meredith has not approved any family vacations as excused absences. AYP measures student attendance as an academic indicator, and Meredith simply cannot afford to set the standard that it is okay to miss instructional time for a family vacation, even if the parent claims the trip is educational.

The United Way campaign kicks off in November. This is the only time of the year the superintendent requests that district employees participate in fundraising efforts. While Meredith does ask her staff to participate in the campaign, she does not spend a

great deal of time soliciting for United Way. She has several staff members who are just getting by financially and does not want them to feel obligated in any way to participate.

The majority of reevaluation meetings are held in November for students who are identified as EC that have not been evaluated in three years. Meredith attends reevaluation meetings to help parents understand that if they choose to go through with a full evaluation, they risk their child placing out of special education services. While she does not discourage reevaluations, Meredith intentionally makes sure parents understand the risks associated with losing these services, including a loss of testing modifications.

Personnel matters continue in November as Meredith completes snapshots, brief observations of staff members who have career status. Of course, follow-up on action plans also occurs during November if Meredith has staff members with performance concerns. Action plan reviews take place monthly through May to determine whether sufficient progress has been made for an “At Standard” rating on the summative evaluation. For teachers who are still not performing on the second observation, Meredith typically calls central office to schedule an outside evaluator to come in for a third observation. She does this to ensure she is not the only person evaluating struggling teachers and for additional legality coverage, should that become necessary.

During informal and formal observations, Meredith takes note of how teachers are treating students who come from different backgrounds than the teachers themselves. She pays careful attention to ways in which teachers, especially veteran teachers, treat students of color and students from Economically Disadvantaged homes. She worries more about this with veteran teachers, who began their teaching careers when schools

were significantly less diverse. Meredith finds it odd that the only professional development offered for culturally inclusive practices is for teachers in their first year. These are the teachers who typically do a much better job with students and families from backgrounds that are different from their own.

Towards the end of November, Meredith's school hosts the annual book fair in conjunction with Family Literacy Night. Parents are invited to visit their children's classrooms for Readers Theater performances, where students demonstrate their ability to read fluently and with expression. Tools and how-to guides are also given to parents to help promote literacy at home. PTA uses Family Literacy Night to gain new members, and dinner is served in the cafeteria. Since her arrival at B Elementary school, Meredith has been pleased with the increase in parent attendance at curriculum-driven parent nights across all socio-cultural groups. She wonders if increased attendance can be attributed to serving dinner to families and holding these events later in the evening than in previous years. November ends with several days spent preparing for the quarterly finance audit. Meredith and her secretary take time making sure all purchases have receipts and align with School Improvement Plan and Title I goals. Prior to the Thanksgiving holiday, Meredith coordinates a canned food drive and talks to teachers about which students and families may need assistance during the winter holidays. She also talks to her music teacher about the winter music program to be sure that no holiday is being specifically celebrated unless they are doing a multicultural event recognizing holidays around the world. Even though she trusts her music teacher, Meredith feels obligated to have the non-secular conversation every year with all teachers. She is unsure if this is because of

her own religious beliefs, or lack thereof, but she does recognize that in addition to increased ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, there are more students with various religious backgrounds in school than in years past. Meredith has always had an affinity for school law and knows that this may also be a factor contributing to her conversations regarding the holidays and school.

December

December is a notably short month on the traditional school calendar. During this time, Meredith completes mid-year reviews of classified employees and makes certain she has finished second round observations and snapshots of career teachers. Meredith spends the first half of the month conducting Title I peer reviews. She reads other schools' Title I plans to ensure compliance with federal guidelines. Meredith is not sure why she is asked to do this but assumes it may be due to her ability to write Title I plans that meet guidelines and audit standards.

The school science fair is also held before winter break. Guest judges, including school board members, visit the school for the day to interview students and determine winners for each category. Meredith makes sure the judges are provided with welcome packets and lunch. She is lucky to have a teacher that serves as the science fair coordinator and does not have to do a great deal of planning for the event.

Professional development sessions continue in December with off-campus meetings including RtI Training and Technology Training. Meredith has spent a great deal of instructional money on getting SmartBoards placed in each classroom. The district has selected her school as one to receive the one-to-one teacher laptop initiative in

which all teachers receive a laptop for instructional use. Meredith receives training on the acceptable use policy for the laptops and then conducts professional development with her own staff.

The week before school lets out for winter break, Meredith does a read aloud in each classroom. North Pole Express, an opportunity for students to “shop” and wrap gifts for parents is set up in the library. Meredith, the school counselor, and the school social worker make sure that families receive needed help for the winter holidays in terms of food and gifts. PTA hospitality provides snacks for teachers each day, and the staff holds its annual holiday party. Meredith always attends the party, which is held at someone’s house. She leaves the planning of this event to staff members. She chooses not to partake in any alcoholic drinks at the party. Some staff members do drink at the party, and some do not. The husbands typically play poker, and Meredith tries carefully to spend equitable amounts of time with each group of staff members, some of whom classify themselves by age, some by grade level, etc. Winter break finally arrives, and while she has plenty to do over the break, Meredith is grateful for some time off.

Over the holiday, Meredith receives a phone call that a student is in the hospital for diabetic issues. She visits the student and the family at the hospital, gives them a gas card to help with expenses, and tells them to call her cell phone if she needs anything at all. The day before Christmas Eve, Meredith receives a phone call from the district energy consultant, requesting that Meredith drive to school to unplug the water fountains to save energy over the holiday. Meredith wonders if this woman has anything better to do with her time but willingly complies with the request.

She spends the weeks of Christmas and New Year's resting and spending time with her family. Meredith checks email daily but resists the temptation to go to school during the two week break. By New Year's day, Meredith has written a new to-do list for when she returns to work and emails staff a calendar outline of the upcoming month's events.

January

The start of the new calendar year provides Meredith with a renewed sense of spirit. She attends scheduled leadership and PTA meetings at the beginning of the month and revisits goals and objectives. She reviews set dates with committees and explains that the school year will move quickly between now and May. January means the true mid-point of the school year as the second nine weeks occurs and curriculum maps are reviewed to ensure effective pacing. Teachers return to school with a determined focus, and students return to school excited but needing a review of structure and routines. The superintendent comes by for a brief visit after the start of the new calendar year. He greets Meredith and walks the building, stopping by her office on the way out to ask her if she needs anything and to commend her hard work.

Data meetings are held again to review most recent formative assessment scores, literacy data, math data, attendance data and informal anecdotal notes from teachers. In addition, she leads conversations surrounding subgroup performance, paying special attention to the performance of Hispanic and Economically Disadvantaged students. She helps teachers revise their small group reading groups to specifically target students that may fall within these subgroups. Meredith makes sure that students have appropriately

been referred to RtI for behavioral and academic interventions if needed. Flexible small groups are revisited for reading and math in all grade levels. Meredith reminds staff members of the continued focus on science instruction. January data meetings also include a discussion surrounding retention letters. Meredith does not usually retain students, especially if they are in upper grades. However, she does require teachers to provide two written notices of the possibility of retention if students are performing below grade level. Meredith keeps a retention spreadsheet and personally signs each retention letter. Teachers feel confident sending retention letters mainly due the amount data that has already been collected in January. Each parent that receives a retention letter is asked to come in for a conference to develop a strategic plan for struggling students. Meredith attends these conferences to help parents understand the retention process itself and the fact that there is still time for students to make progress.

Meredith has hired many new teachers since she first arrived at B Elementary. Increasing the diversity of her staff in terms of ethnic diversity and gender remains a priority as Meredith's teaching staff is largely white and female. At recruiting events, she makes a conscious effort to talk to candidates that are from different ethnic backgrounds. Meredith tries to do a good job of walking the line of supporter and not friend, especially with younger teachers. Many of her teachers are from states in the Northeast and they too have a certain readjustment period when returning from winter break. Meredith meets with all new teachers after the break to answer any questions and to hear concerns. Even though they have an assigned mentor, Meredith thinks it is important that these teachers also feel comfortable coming to her. She knows how much she still relies on her own

mom and cannot imagine how new teachers are still managing to cope thousands of miles away from home.

The latter half of January consists of an early release day. This is an opportunity for principals to plan professional development. Meredith chooses to use this time for teachers to plan integrated science units. She develops teams and leads the staff development process. Some central office leaders come to observe the training and seem pleased with the content and use of early release time. Meredith sends home a parent letter to a Kindergarten class in January in preparation for a teacher who is going on maternity leave. She has ensured that the teacher has plans ready, and they have secured an excellent substitute for the leave. In anticipation of winter weather, Meredith sends an email reminding staff members to use their best judgment in the event of hazardous road conditions.

The third round of observations are peer observations. Meredith is careful in selecting which teachers will be observing other teachers. She sends out a template for observations and coverage schedules. Meredith and her curriculum facilitator cover teachers' classrooms in order to allow them to observe their peers. Meredith attends restraint training with her Exceptional Children (EC) staff members. Although they do not have to use physical restraint often, it does help to have a refresher on appropriate restraint methods and procedures when situations arise.

February

Meredith sends home invitations for the second nine weeks awards assemblies. She sends the A honor roll student names to the local newspaper. Meredith meets with

the School Improvement Plan team to revisit goals and progress made thus far. She shares the remaining Title I budget with the committee and explains that all Title I monies must be spent by the end of February. The committee agrees that purchasing nonfiction texts for each classroom will be the best use of these remaining funds. Meredith has a hard time navigating the concept of the confidentiality of students receiving free/reduced lunch. She knows these numbers are pulled in March to determine if the school will still receive school-wide Title I status the following year. She sometimes finds herself almost begging parents to fill out free/reduced lunch applications. In February, Meredith decides to ask PTA if they will cover the cost of students with lunch balances owing more than \$5 if parents will fill out free/reduced lunch applications. PTA agrees and Meredith hopes this will keep her numbers high enough to keep school-wide Title I status, meaning more than 50% of students receive free/reduced lunch. In addition to issues with keeping numbers up, Meredith is very aware that her school's greatest concern in terms of student achievement is the performance of her Economically Disadvantaged subgroup. Her focus on small group instruction is due to her focus on closing the achievement gap between Economically Disadvantaged and non-Economically Disadvantaged students. To make the situation more complex, Meredith is not permitted to know which students already receive free/reduced lunch. In preparation for the last half the school year, Meredith prepares a spreadsheet indicating which students are in which subgroup. She adds a column indicating her best guess of students in grades 3-5 that may be considered Economically Disadvantaged.

Meredith is at an interesting point in her career in terms of her classification as both mentor and mentee. In February, she has her normal monthly dinner meeting with her mentor. They discuss current gossip, personnel struggles, and frustration with district initiatives. Just days after this meeting, Meredith receives an email from the personnel director asking if she will be willing to serve as a mentor for a new principal that has just been hired. Meredith is excited and accepts the opportunity but wonders if the personnel support department remembers that she still has a mentor herself. She takes this request as a compliment and decides that she will just continue to be both a mentor and mentee.

Several snow days are called during the month of February, and Meredith knows this will impact the remainder of the instructional school year. Either Spring Break will be impacted, or they will have to hold school on Saturdays. Neither scenario is good, so she just waits to see what the board decides. Meredith starts an optional book study with teacher assistants on *How Boys and Girls Learn Differently*. Her curriculum facilitator starts a similar study with classroom teachers on *Using Nonfiction Mentor Texts in Daily Instruction*. Meredith is pleased with number of assistants and teachers who sign up for the optional book studies, as this time is volunteered and does not include compensation.

In February, Meredith is subpoenaed to court to testify in a custody hearing for one of her second grade students. She knows both of the parents and does not have an opinion on which parent should have primary custody of the child. She reviews the child's attendance record and academic performance and shares that she enjoys working with both parents. Later in the month, Meredith finds out that the joint custody decision means that the child will be with one parent Monday-Thursday and the other parent

Friday-Monday and wonders whether she should have mentioned the difficulty some students have when they transition between parents' homes during the school week.

Remaining days in February are consumed with IEP meetings. The schoolwide spelling bee is held, and the school winner goes on to compete at the district competition. At the end of the month, Meredith meets with the three third grade teachers. This grade level has had a hard time collaborating since the start of the school year. Meredith explains that small group expectations will remain in place through the end of the school year and reminds the teachers that they are not expected use the same instructional strategies; however they are expected to work collaboratively in the best interest of students.

March

Spring pictures and sending in the yearbook for final publication take place during the first week in March. Meredith carefully reviews the schedule through the end of the year to make sure that disruptions will be limited during testing. She schedules transition meetings for 5th grade EC students going to middle school. This year, the meetings are to held at the middle school site, so this will take a considerably large amount of time on Meredith's calendar. She always worries about the state of teaching and learning when she visits the middle school. Although she assures parents that it will be a smooth transition, Meredith spends a great deal of time worrying about many kids who she knows will get lost as merely numbers in the middle school setting.

Planning remediation for struggling students drives the last round of data meetings prior to testing. At this meeting, Meredith asks teachers to list students who

may not pass. She uses this list to develop her own proposed remediation plan for students who have to retest in late May. While this plan always changes based on actual outcomes, she likes to have a template to use. If nothing else, it prevents additional late nights during May, which are already stressful enough.

Family Math Night is held during March. Parents come to school and participate in math games led by students. They have dinner and take a math game home to promote number sense development in all grade levels. Attendance at Family Math Night is always lower than Family Literacy Night, which is held in the fall. Meredith assumes this is because of the prevalence of spring sports. Regardless, a modest turnout makes Family Math Night well worth the effort.

Central office directors and assistant superintendents spend two hours in classrooms at Meredith's school for an unannounced Instructional Site Visit in March. The team meets with Meredith at the end of their visit to discuss strengths and areas for growth. She has prepared informational folders with schoolwide initiatives and student data collected thus far in the school year. Meredith is pleased with the outcome of the meeting but wishes they would have stayed longer to see more of the instructional day.

At the last staff meeting in March, Meredith distributes letters of intent to staff members for the following school year. She reminds them that this is not binding but merely an effort to gather preliminary information for planning purposes. Meredith always wonders what letters of intent from staff members who have been on action plans will state. Another issue for the staff meeting is the discussion of head lice. Meredith reminds teachers that they cannot mass screen or even target students for lice. Even

though the problem seems to be worse this time of year, they must be careful not to profile students and ensuring student privacy is maintained when handling potential lice cases is an expectation.

Meredith attends the 5th grade field trip to Biltmore in March. She rides the bus that leaves at 5am on a Thursday morning and returns at 6pm the following day.

Although the trip is exhausting, Meredith is always pleased with student behavior and knows students and parents thoroughly enjoy the opportunity. Spring break is just around the corner, and everyone seems ready.

April

In April, Meredith conducts observations in grades 3-5. She knows that these teachers will begin intensive remediation as soon as they return from Spring Break. Meredith uses intent letters to notify the hospitality committee of teachers who will be retiring at the end of the school year, as long as these staff members are willing to share this information. Third quarter report cards are sent home, and Meredith conducts the second to last awards program of the year.

Meredith meets with Kindergarten teachers to plan Kindergarten Orientation. She also assembles materials and a streaming iMovie presentation for the upcoming job fair. Final IEP meetings are scheduled, and Meredith attends the elementary principals' meeting. In the days leading up to Spring Break, discipline referrals increase, and Meredith knows everyone is in need of a break. Meredith works with her curriculum facilitator to finalize and submit the remediation plan for May. This plan anticipates which students may not pass, who will conduct remediation, and how remediation will be

conducted between the first round of testing and the retest. Meredith hates guessing which kids will not perform. She feels like she is putting them down before even giving them a chance.

Meredith and her family travel to the beach for Spring Break. She takes her laptop so that she can organize emails that have not been organized and filed since she last went through them in December. Spring Break passes quickly, and when Meredith sends out her weekly agenda on the following Sunday, she reminds staff that the next few weeks will be crunch time in terms of preparing students for End of Grade testing.

When she meets with the leadership team, Meredith distributes class roll cards for teachers to begin working on student assignments for next year. She reminds teachers of class size caps and shares projected numbers of teachers per grade level for the following school year. Changes in enrollment always provide a source of tension among teachers as they wonder who will be moved to a different grade level. Meredith attempts to ease tensions by meeting with each classroom teacher individually. At these meetings in the last part of April, Meredith completes summative assessments and signs off on professional development plan. While she knows there are some forums to share information via email and in whole group settings, Meredith realizes that placements in different grade levels are conversations that need to be held one-on-one. She also reminds each staff member that these are simply projections and that placements and numbers will not be finalized until the state budget passes and central office distributes allotments to principals. In preparation for the following school year, Meredith, a Leadership Team member and the PTA president meet with fundraiser and photography representatives.

Dealing with salesmen is one of Meredith's least favorite parts of her job, so she tries to schedule as few of these meetings as possible.

Meredith attends the fourth grade trip to the coast during the latter part of the month. Similar to fifth grade, this is a two-day trip. Fourth grade teachers do an excellent job planning down to the fine details. Parents are always more of a nuisance than a help on overnight field trips. Meredith cannot believe she has to ask parent chaperones not to smoke in front of students, not to mention needing to remind them that no alcohol is permitted in rooms. She often wonders if parents expect her to be more lenient because she is similar to them in age when in truth, nothing could be farther from the truth. She is careful to stand her ground consistently with parents, especially those who may question her abilities due to her lack of experience.

May

May is the month when Meredith spends a great deal of time telling teachers what a great job they have done all year. She reminds them that they have been intentional with instruction and have been preparing students since day one. She sends reminders of spirit week and the pep rally leading up to the week of testing. On the Friday night before testing begins, the school hosts Spring Fling. Spring Fling is PTA's big event where students, parents, and teachers gather on the ball field. It is a mini-carnival of sorts, and everyone shares in the fun. Spring Fling is the PTA's biggest fundraiser of the year. Dinner is served at the concession stand, a local auctioneer is on hand, and inside the building, the art teacher holds an art show. Meredith and her husband stay around until everything is cleaned up and get home around midnight. While Meredith tries not to

spend a great deal of time talking about test scores, she does recognize the importance of celebrating successes and relieving stress prior to the week of testing. Because of the state model and the opportunity to retest, Meredith understands that the middle of May begins testing, and the process does not end until students go home for the summer. With makeup testing, remediation, and retesting, some students miss end of year celebrations because they are still involved in testing. Meredith and her testing coordinator hold administrator and proctor training the week before testing begins.

Final action plan reviews are also held in May. Meredith invites the personnel director to these meetings as she plans to non-renew one teacher who has not yet resigned. While she remains calm and positive during May, anticipation of test scores combined with the stress of firing a teacher has negative implications on Meredith's health. She develops stress-induced shingles just days before testing begins. Meredith has not taken any sick days during the course of the school year but is forced to do so on the Friday before test week.

End of Grade tests are administered during the third full week in May. On Thursday of testing week, Meredith and her staff send letters to all students to share test scores. She takes time to personally call parents of students that did not pass the first time. Her school counselor helps make these phone calls. She wants parents of students who scores Level 1s and 2s to understand the difference in procedures and wants them to help in the process of boosting student confidence prior to the retest. Meredith is careful to remember what K-2 teachers are experiencing at the end of the school year. Specialists

and instructional assistants are pulled for testing and K-2 teachers are left to fend for themselves. She takes special care to check in on K-2 teachers during this time.

Meredith attends the district job fair in May even though she does not have any known vacancies. The district level job fair is always a competition of sorts among schools in terms of table appearance, level of interest of attendees, and even level of dress among principals. Even though she participates, Meredith finds this competition to be quite amusing among a room of professional adults. Before Memorial Day, Meredith conducts DARE graduation for fifth graders. Parents come and some shed tears in anticipation of fifth grade graduation. Meredith knows parents are worried about the transition for fifth graders from her school to the middle school. Although she does not show it, she is worried too.

June

Meredith receives preliminary testing results in June and is very pleased. Three weeks after the first round of testing, she checks herself back into reality. On the outside, she does not share her tension with testing. Instead, she serves as the voice of reason, assuring everyone that good instruction yields good results, and she is not worried. However, she knows inside that she is worried too, until she receives preliminary proficiency reports in June. The process of remediating and retesting is time-consuming and complicated. However, because she has put a great deal of time into the plan from the beginning, Meredith has learned to navigate the retest process in a relatively low-stress fashion.

The remaining days of June consist of teachers filling out classroom inventories, finalizing class rolls, and compiling schedule feedback forms. Staff morale is relatively high in June. Remediation is a team approach; preliminary test scores are good, and teachers are ready for summer. The last days of school are hectic as field days are held, and Meredith conducts fifth grade graduation. Not one dry eye exists among fifth grade parents following the fifth grade video. Perhaps most telling of all, Meredith spends the last day of school counseling fifth grade parents. She wonders how she would feel if she were sending her own child to middle school. Regardless, Meredith realizes another year is almost behind her. She is ready for teachers to leave for the summer but is pleased with progress during the school year.

Meredith considers the level to which her role as principal is a public position and wonders if this contributes to her unemotional persona. Even when chaos is occurring during the school year and people are upset, Meredith keeps her calm, realizing that she may unintentionally view emotion as a sign of weakness. While she admits to getting frustrated on occasion, Meredith realizes that she is seldom angry or overly-excited. She keeps her feelings that do arise internalized to maintain her even-keeled temperament. As soon as the hallways quiet, Meredith breathes a sigh of relief, perhaps the most emotion she has displayed all year, and realizes it is time to begin preparing for the new school year, and the cycle begins again . . .

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS OF PRINCIPALS' DESCRIPTIONS OF INFLUENCES ON THEIR WORK

Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.
—Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Computers

Chapter VI transitions from the composite narrative story of Meredith to a discussion of specific examples of data collected from individual principals. The conceptual framework from the methodology is revisited with a discussion of findings related to context and resulting themes from the research study itself.

Conceptual Framework with Findings

Revisiting the conceptual framework in light of the detailed narratives shared in the last two chapters yields distinct findings on the work of principals studied. The updated conceptual framework (see Figure 3) indicates categories of findings, including themes established during the data analysis process.

Context

One category that consistently influenced young, female elementary school principals' work is the contemporary context in which they are working, including: (a) education policy and law, (b) technology, and (c) socio-cultural factors.

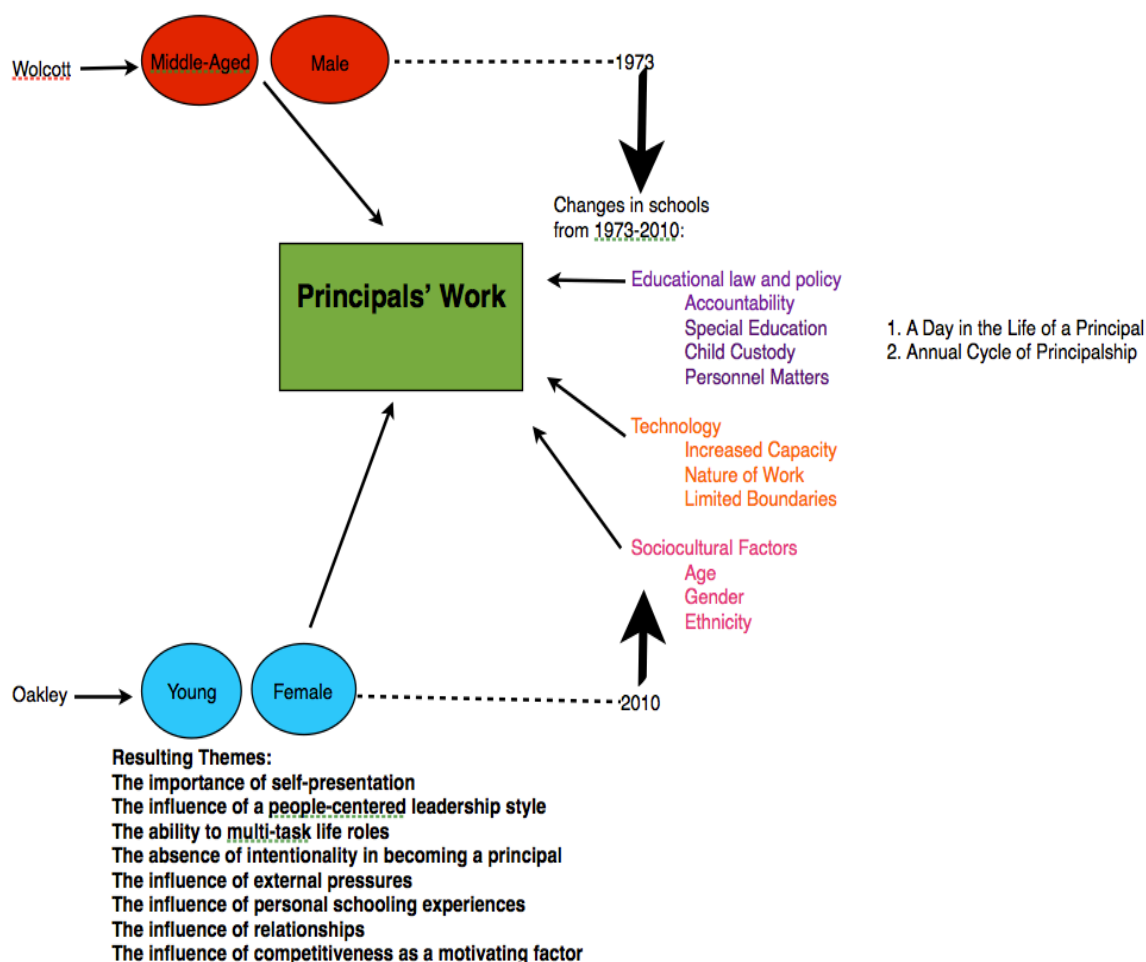


Figure 3. Revised Conceptual Framework

Educational Policy and Law

In discussing educational laws that impact their work, principals discussed accountability, special education, child custody, and personnel matters as key factors that arise in the daily and annual operations of their schools. They discussed the necessity of being comfortable with school law including staying up to date on policy changes online and catching up on new legislation during the summer months. In citing potentially difficult issues related to lawsuits, one principal said, “Being knowledgeable of school

law is mostly important when dealing with student discipline and special education.”

Principals noted that they read board policies on the computer and keep an updated public school law book on the bookshelf, even though they only refer to the book once or twice a year. Principals practicing in the twenty-first century are charged with maintaining a working knowledge of the law as part of their ongoing knowledge base that is used in daily decision-making practices (Militello, Schimmel, & Eberwein, 2009).

Hope and Pigford (2001) write, “While educational policy is based on the reality of legislators, implementation of policy is dependent on the realities of educators” (p. 44). Participants reported responsibility for enforcement and monitoring of issues that surface when dealing with specific educational laws and policies including special education, rights of teachers and students, student achievement as measured by high stakes testing, equal academic opportunities for all student populations, and implications for schools not meeting state and federal standards. Significant legislative implications exist for school leaders who do not enforce procedures related to due process and student rights to confidentiality and privacy. Yell and Rozalski (2008) write, “When a school district is sued over a particular disciplinary incident, the court will often examine the school’s rules and consequences to determine whether administrators were fair and reasonable” (p. 14). Participants brought up several specific types of situations in which knowledge of legal and policy matters have been important aspects of their work.

Accountability. More than any time in years past, principals are expected to keep student achievement at the forefront of their work (West et al., 2009). When describing how testing has impacted their work, one principal stated, “it is huge here—performance

is tied to sanctions, and of course the money that is tied to Title I schools is great, but avoiding sanctions is most important.” Principals discussed the accountability model itself and the amount of time spent getting teachers to understand growth and proficiency. They noted that their main task is to help teachers understand the need to show growth with individual students through research-based teaching practices. They believe that if teachers plan strategically and hold high expectations for all students, the test scores will come and principals do not need to spend too much time talking about the scores themselves. In explaining her work, one principal stated,

I think it’s really easy to say, we want to be 80 percent proficient in two years and mean it. But, I think my daily job is to go in and hold teachers accountable for doing what they say they are doing and doing it in a way that kids get it. More than just talking about scores all the time.

Participants indicated that accountability has become a top priority for twenty-first century principals. Data from the current study indicate principals are more likely to attend meetings in which measures of accountability are discussed than other types of meetings. For example, principals are more likely to prioritize meetings to discuss student achievement using performance data as opposed to grade level meetings in which teachers from a specific grade level discuss curriculum plans. The emphasis on utilizing data to measure progress and practice has created an environment in which accountability is discussed on a daily basis. Maintaining accountability, while not losing sight of what is best for students, is a struggle for young female principals. Each principal interviewed started her career as a teacher who cared for children, but now feels increasing pressures

to produce measurable results. Accountability, therefore, has brought new and unwelcome sources of stress to the principalship itself.

Participants in the current study identified accountability practices that influence their daily encounters, both formally and informally. Formal activities reported regarding accountability include attending data meetings to discuss student performance, attending district-wide accountability trainings, creating reports, and reporting accountability data to key stakeholders. Informal activities reported regarding accountability include informal conversations with staff members, paying attention to current events related to accountability, and reflecting on school-wide instructional practices.

Special education. Each principal recalled examples in which knowledge of special education law was a critical consideration when making decisions about daily operations such as scheduling, discipline, and testing. One principal recalled a recent incident in which a student who had not yet been identified for Exceptional Children (EC) services was having major behavior problems, being physically aggressive, and using inappropriate language. During the course of a five-day suspension, paperwork was completed that officially labeled the student as having a disability. The principal discussed contacting the special education director at central office for his input on holding a Manifestation Determination (MD) as the student was nearing a total of ten days of out of school suspension. She remembered discussing the laws protecting rights of students with special needs in terms of disciplinary actions with the student's parents and members of her own staff. Perhaps the most challenging facet of school law in terms of frequent updates, amendments, and paperwork legislation, special education presents

its own set of unique circumstances for practicing principals and requires principals to be active and knowledgeable participants. Lawsuits related to due process are primarily the responsibility of the building-level administrator and special education is therefore a markedly significant aspect of principals' work (Tissington, 2006).

Awareness of special education law is an important part of principals' work. Interestingly, with this specific student population, principals are also responsible for ensuring adherence to these laws. Attending meetings, especially those related to students who receive special education services are noted throughout the data. Principals in the study indicate the need to maintain a working knowledge of specific content of special education students' IEPs, including testing modifications as this has an impact on school-wide testing plans. Principals are legally responsible for ensuring compliance with federal legislation related to testing codes of ethics, appropriate modifications, discipline procedures, and placement of special education students in the least restrictive environment. Although special education staff is often responsible for practices related to special education law, principals are held accountable ensuring adherence to these practices.

Child custody. Practicing principals are responsible for ensuring safe environments for students involved in custody cases (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007). As estimated by each participant, the number of custody alerts at this sample of schools totaled almost one third of each school's student population. Principals said parents are often disgruntled when the school requires identification before letting them sign out students. However, they explained that this is a measure to protect student safety. Some

principals mentioned refusing to let parents call to make changes in terms of the way their children were going home in the afternoon. “They cannot call and make their child a bus rider if he or she is normally a car rider,” one explained. This is because anyone can call on the phone and change transportation for a child and this is not safe considering the complexity of the custody paperwork. As a result, transportation changes require a request in writing from parents, either handwritten notes, emails, or faxes. Several parents complained about this policy to this particular principal’s superintendent, who ultimately continued to support this stance on the rules she enforces at her school.

Notable student rights and confidentiality issues were discussed when principals described procedures within their schools related to child custody agreements. Principals are responsible for maintaining an ongoing knowledge of custody agreements, which includes taking the time to review cumulative files of students and keeping a database or log of signed paperwork and dates related to child custody. Principals mentioned the importance of knowing which parents are permitted access to student information and knowing which parents are permitted to have lunch with students and visit campus during the day. Although involvement in child custody often results in parent disputes with principals, participants cited awareness and adherence to child custody as a non-negotiable aspect of their work related to student safety.

Personnel matters. Four of the research participants had been faced with non-renewing teachers. They discussed how much time documentation of below standard performance takes in order to have sufficient documentation to non-renew. Among their peers, principals who have non-renewed teachers at their schools are seen as tougher than

some other principals because of their willingness to put teachers who are not performing on action plans and to follow through with non-renewal if necessary. Firing teachers is one of the hardest things principals have to do; however, knowing that children are not getting what they need because a particular teacher is not doing her job provides plenty of ammunition to make difficult personnel decisions. In order to ensure that policy is followed on teacher rights and non-renewal practices, careful documentation is maintained, human resources directors are invited to sit in on action plan meetings, and the Director of Elementary Education is made aware of all performance concerns. Principals recognized the necessity to carefully follow policies and guidelines for non-renewal. One principal was shocked at the end of her first year when she found out that only five teachers were being dismissed from their positions in the entire district, and she dismissed three of them. When asked about this process, she stated,

When you tell someone, 'here is your folder with your action plan and all of the necessary documentation, and you can choose to resign, or I will non-renew you, but you do not have a job here anymore,' you think about their own kids and families. I think that was the hardest but most important thing I've had to do. It taught me a lot about myself and my ability to have difficult conversations, and it showed other teachers that we are not going to settle here.

Principals' ability to effectively and purposefully evaluate teachers is increasingly important as budget shortfalls and student achievement measures intensify the role of instructional leadership (Day, 2000).

In addition, principals are required to follow state law in regard to procedures for evaluating teachers. Although principals have the right to evaluate teacher performance, explicit documentation is required to dismiss poorly performing teachers. As part of the

teacher evaluation process, principals are responsible for providing opportunities for professional development to ensure teachers have sufficient credits for license renewal. While completing informal and formal evaluations, as indicated by state guidelines, can be completed by assistant principals and principals, participants mentioned spending a great deal of time evaluating teachers on their own. They were reluctant to delegate this task to assistant principals as often as they should, in an effort to maintain control and consistency with the evaluation process. Because principals in the study were all principals at Title I schools, they are also required to maintain a 100% highly qualified staff and therefore have more stringent hiring criteria. Recent budget years resulted in smaller instructional allotments for principals interviewed. Principals mentioned losing temporary staff members and staff members who were “last-hired” as an emotionally trying consequence of the suffering economy.

Technology

When asked about her technology dependence, one principal laughed, “I seriously look at the BlackBerry at least 100 times a day. When I can’t find it for a few seconds, I go into a complete panic.” The reliance on technology has become commonplace for principals, who now work in an environment where people can reach them through various mediums twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week.

Increased capacity. When examining influences on the work of principals in the twenty-first century, the influx of technology in terms of communicating, teaching, and learning is immeasurable. School principals encountered issues related to technology that were unheard of when Wolcott was describing Ed Bell’s work in the 1960s. In the course

of a day, principals reported using technology to communicate with members of the educational community, to drive instructional practices, and to make their own work transparent.

Three of the principals had their own voicemail and two used the computer next to the phone to track messages in order to provide sufficient documentation in the event they were questioned about a phone call. One principal stated, “I had one message yesterday, but it was a hang-up. I see a green light when I have a message, and I keep a log on my desktop that I pull up and enter any voicemail, and as I return it, I mark whether I’ve left a message or spoken with the person.” In addition to tracking voicemail messages, one principal also used the computer to keep track of morning announcements. The announcements were typed each day so that there was a record of everything that had been announced for the year. There was a running document on the computer desktop, and if something was brought to a principal’s attention to announce, it was typed it into the document. In addition, this made it easy for assistant principals or other staff to have access to announcements if a principal was out of the building. As simple as these processes sound, if a returned phone call was in question with a parent, or if a staff member was upset for not knowing about a school event, these logs provided documentation.

Nature of work. The fast-paced nature of principals’ work can be attributed partially to the prominence of technology. As one principal explained, “I try really hard to have zero wait time. If a teacher or parent emails me, within an hour, doesn’t matter what day of the week it is, she or he is going to get a response.” In addition, a public

events calendar was kept online so that staff had access to scheduled meetings, due dates, assemblies, and other important information. While personal appointments were not listed in detail, times when principals had a hair or a dentist appointment were listed as “busy”; however there were typically a few key staff members (e.g., school secretary or media specialist) who had access to all details of a principal’s private calendar, depending on whom a principal trusted most or who needed access to the information. Three participants also used the Google calendar feature to invite others to events, such as IEP meetings. The expectation existed within the building that everyone checked the Google calendar daily and planned accordingly.

While there are numerous benefits of using technology as a communication tool, sometimes, depending on the nature of the topic, some conversations are better had in person as opposed to via email. One principal explained,

There is always a conscious decision about whether this is the best thing to communicate through email, or should I talk to this person directly? And I don’t always make the right decision. It’s always very easy to respond too quickly if you just use email to communicate.

One principal referred to herself as “such a computer geek” and realized that her fondness of technology may have a great deal to do with her age. She tried to keep this in mind when enforcing use of technology within her building, understanding that it was easier for some teachers than others. Principals referred to taking on the role of educating teachers about building their own knowledge of technology as a scaffolded process. Staff development trainings sometimes had to be differentiated for teachers based on their comfort levels with technology implementation.

Principals also maintained their school's websites, several stating that they had been in charge of the overall school website since beginning their careers as teachers. Two principals acknowledged this task could be delegated, but referred to it as something they enjoy. Parents are more techno-savvy than in the past, and students are very capable of using the school website as an informational tool, as well. Even though many parents at her school did not have computer access at home, one principal said, "it is becoming more of a norm" for parents to find ways of accessing the Internet.

Limited boundaries. In terms of tools related to technology, the BlackBerry seemed to have the most significant impact on principals' daily work. All principals interviewed carried a BlackBerry smart phone. One principal confessed to intentionally leaving the BlackBerry in a separate room so that she was not tempted to look at it while she was having dinner with her family. However, for the rest of the day, the BlackBerry was constantly within her reach. "I seriously look at the BlackBerry at least 100 times a day. When I can't find it for a few seconds, I go into a complete panic," she reluctantly admitted. While she did not feel obligated to always send messages, she liked to read emails as soon as the red light blinked in order to make sure she did not miss anything.

As part of instructional leadership, principals were intentional in their efforts to encourage student-centered technology into daily instruction. Many classrooms now have a SmartBoard installed, teachers have laptops to take to and from school, and many school campuses are wireless. In addition, staff members now have access to flip cameras, student laptops, Senteo Response Systems, and numerous other tools. While some teachers feel more comfortable integrating technology than others, principals said

they used the teacher evaluation process to set goals for teachers who may be resistant to utilize technological tools within their own classrooms. Student engagement measures and overall achievement data leave very little up for debate in terms of the significance of using technology in the classroom.

Use of technology is non-negotiable. Principals' descriptions of personal Facebook pages is also reflective of a technological shift for this generation of building administrators. One principal claimed that she uses Facebook as part of her screening process for new teachers. She said, "If they aren't smart enough to make their pages private and not have immature behaviors posted all over the place, I don't want them working in my building." When asked about her own use of Facebook, she said she has thirty friends on her page, has everything marked private, and does not let anyone post any pictures of her.

Commonalities of subjects studied indicates that young principals enjoy using technology, consider themselves to be technologically savvy, and have difficulty imagining how they would manage their position without access to technological tools, including BlackBerrys, laptops, and wireless internet. Instructional practices, personal productivity, and transparency of work are all characteristics of the principalship that have been influenced by technology in recent years.

All study participants noted personal productivity as a non-negotiable component of their work. Each subject referenced using technology to manage time, track documentation, and increase overall efficiency. Paperless calendars, online teacher evaluations, and aligning resources with technology goals are modes of principals' work

that are unique to the principalship of today. Subjects studied each confessed to somewhat of a technology addiction, when referencing their use of the BlackBerry to stay linked to important emails and phone calls.

Just as technology contributes positively to effective time management for young female school leaders, the level of access to principals by others has increased greatly with the use of email. All principals studied made an effort to be transparent in practice, keeping an open and accessible calendar and returning messages and emails within a short time period. Technological advances have brought new meaning to the days of having an open door policy. Levels of access to principals have also increased as a result of twenty-first century technology tools and is requiring them to be more transparent in their practices, a trend that poses challenges but was viewed as beneficial by subjects studied.

Challenges mentioned include an increased difficulty for principals to leave work at work. Subjects within the research study cited difficulty in being able to balance home and work as a direct impact of the constant availability made possible by carrying a BlackBerry seven days a week, 24 hours a day. One participant mentioned her need to keep her work-related technology in another room when spending time with her family as a strategy to balance her role as principal and her role as wife and mother.

Furthermore, principals reported an expectation that they are technologically proficient, a noteworthy topic when principals evaluate their impact on teachers who likely have varying levels of technological proficiency. This is an example of a time when both organizational and instructional leadership decisions are important.

Participants reported using practices such as scaffolding staff development to enable teachers of varying ability levels to increase use of technology in classroom instruction. Principals must navigate the fine line between overwhelming teachers who are not comfortable with basic technology practices with providing adequate resources for teachers who are eager to integrate student-centered technology into the daily classroom environment. Communicating clear expectations related to technology and instructional practices was a common practice among subjects studied. These expectations included principals spending time monitoring teachers' use of technology via classroom websites, online grading, blog posts and emails.

Simultaneously, principals also reported helping teachers understand clear boundaries related to personal use of technology and professional responsibility. Principals must be explicit in defining acceptable practices for teachers' use of technology, specifically social networking sites that include photos, comments, and personal/professional affiliations. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, create opportunities for teachers to network with other professionals, maintain current knowledge of best practice, and display professional memberships publicly. However, teachers' participation in social networking sites have also resulted in numerous legal suits, not to mention issues such as inappropriate messaging, and confidentiality issues when pictures are posted online. Staying abreast of trends in technology is a prerequisite, principals reported, that is required in twenty-first century practices.

While gender does not necessarily have an impact on the influence of technology in principals' work, age is certainly a relevant factor. The ability to use technology in the

role as instructional leader, as well as providing appropriate staff development opportunities, are initiatives directly linked to principals' comfort levels with technology (Dawson & Rakes, 2003). "I grew up as a digital native," one principal explained. "It is how our kids are learning these days, so it is going to have to be how we engage them in the instructional process." Palfrey and Gasser (2008) define digital natives as those who had access to digital technology from the time they were born and therefore use technology with a natural fluency that has to be methodically learned by those not considered digital natives.

Socio-cultural Factors

As practicing young female principals, socio-cultural factors influence priorities, decisions, and leadership style. Age, gender, ethnic diversity and socioeconomic status are socio-cultural factors that are evident in the research that influence the work of principals practicing in the twenty-first century. Awareness of their own personal socio-cultural factors is also necessary for principals when describing their work.

Certainly when discussing socio-cultural factors that influence the principalship, principals realized that their perspectives as young, female principals may differ from the perspectives of male principals, or even older female principals. Furthermore, the lens of a white, heterosexual female under the age of forty is also significant when considering descriptions of socio-cultural influences on participants' work. Each of these factors separately, but also cumulatively, impact the perspective of the principals' experiences. For example, principals under the age of 40 are more likely to have attended schools that were more socio-culturally diverse in terms of demographic makeup than older

principals, such as Ed Bell (Wolcott, 1973), who are more likely to have attended schools with little diversity. However, the experiences of a forty-year-old male and a forty-year-old female can also be extremely varied, therefore, it is important to keep in mind that all of these socio-cultural factors are important to consider when reading and interpreting principal narratives included in this study.

Within the research study, all participants explicitly discussed the significance of age and gender and the role these factors play in their work. Principals discussed their feelings and recalled specific events pertaining to how they are perceived by others based solely on their appearance. They mentioned examples in which they were questioned as to whether they were actually the authority figure in their respective schools. Participants attributed this to both age and gender, citing that circumstances would likely be different if they were older or male.

Age. Principals within this study were all under the age of forty. In describing their work, they were careful to note the differences they perceive between themselves and their older colleagues. Age was discussed as a primary factor relating to principals' working relationships, credibility, and career plans.

Relationships with teachers, supervisors, and parents vary based on age perception. Once principal stated,

Young teachers see me as an expert, but I don't know if that's the case for older teachers. None of them are going to say, 'I don't think you know what you are talking about.' I do think telling them, 'I am in graduate school, and here are my research interests,' is an approach that helps with veteran teachers. But I also know they are going to look at me and say, 'How long could you have possibly taught?'

Establishing working relationships with supervisors can also be impacted by age as one principal noted,

In the past, my supervisor has been an older white female nearing retirement age. This year, my supervisor is an African-American male, a little older than me, but not much. We've actually had some classes together, and I feel much more comfortable with him sharing ideas than I did with my previous supervisor.

Principals wondered if working relationships with people that are closer in age is easier because of trust, common interests, or other factors. Regardless, participants discussed the awareness of the impact of their age on their comfort level with coworkers, regardless of their position status.

In terms of credibility, principals realized age perceptions could be positive or negative, depending on the audience. Certainly, as one principal explained, "modeling practices such as going to graduate school shows teachers, regardless of their age, that I think professional development is important."

Professionally, principals mentioned struggling to gain trust of parents and staff members because they came across as very young, especially when starting a position at a new school. One principal admitted, "It's like I'm automatically not as credible because they can't tell I'm the principal just by looking at me." Earning the respect of others was discussed as a strategic process for study participants. As one principal said,

I really have to earn respect of others because I am young and female. I mean I really have to have conversations with people, and I think I have to do a little bit more talking with people because they see a young female standing there and go so far as to question whether I am the principal.

Principals attributed misconceptions such as these to appearance. One principal stated, “I think people have a perception of principals as being older and more grandmotherly,” and “I don’t want my hair to be completely gray before people start believing I know what the hell I’m doing.”

Because others frequently question the authority of participants and make judgments on their ability based on appearance, principals discussed the great deal of intent they had as new principals trying to prove themselves. Principals discussed spending time their first year proving they were smart and organized, always trying to have things turned in before anyone else and working hard to have an image of staying ahead of the game.

Although principals’ appearance led to a lack of credibility in some instances, benefits associated with age were also cited. One principal said part of being a young female is that she is very social,

I think most young females are very social. If you are in this job, you are social, and you want to interact with people socially and not just on a professional level. I think just asking people about how their day is, how things are going, sharing about my family, helps me relate to them as a person.

Young, female principals’ abilities to relate to other people and to get to know staff members helps in building trust within their school buildings. Appearing as young also led to others feeling comfortable asking them for help, including teachers, colleagues, and supervisors. “I’m spending lots of time helping people get through graduate school,” one principal shared. She realized this is because she has encouraged others to pursue graduate degrees and remembered her supervisor asking for her help stating, “Honey, do

you know how long it has been since I was in college?” This principal wondered if people were asking her for help because they think she is smart or because she is young, and surely she must remember how to do well in college. She also realized that since a great deal of graduate work requires using technology, this may also explain why her older colleagues and coworkers consistently email and call with questions.

While research participants discussed both positive and negative implications related to age, principals were hesitant in discussing whether they planned to remain principals for the duration of their career. One principal mentioned that she realizes she is very early in her career and will probably not retire as a principal. “I love what I do,” she sighed, “but I don’t think that it’s what I’m supposed to be doing forever.”

Gender. The study sample was composed of five female participants. While some benefits exist in terms of being a practicing female principal, participants cited obstacles faced in which others questioned their ability based on gender. One principal recalled,

I mean I literally was walking through the rotunda area the same time the parent had stepped out the teacher’s classroom, and she just hollered at me and said, ‘We need to be setting up a meeting!’ And then the next think out of her mouth was, ‘you and me and a school board member.’ And I’m sitting here thinking if that was just her being irrational or if parents are feeling the need to bring in other authority figures because I’m young and female.

Recalling situations related to gender consisted primarily of principals being compared to previous administrators who were older and, in most cases, male.

One principal referred to her gender as an asset in describing how she relates to others, “For me, I’m willing to take the time to talk through things more than a male

principal might. That's a female trait I feel like I really have. I like to get to know people."

One principal stated she was more likely to sit with the male principals than the cliquish group of female principals during meetings. She thought back to when she was growing up—"I found myself getting along easier with my male friends than I did with my female friends because I couldn't stand the smiling at me and then walking down the hall and talking about me" that girls did. This participant discussed feeling more comfortable with male colleagues as "not an age thing. I think it's a male-female thing." "I've just always had more guy friends," she stated. All participants mentioned the need to hire more male staff members. One principal laughed when she explained how grateful she was to have finally hired a male teacher, a rarity in the elementary setting. "Having male teachers is nice for me because I can't deal with a bunch of estrogen. I need some testosterone to level it out," she said.

When asked about benefits of being young and female, principals mentioned that sometimes being young and female can help get things done. One participant said, "I don't know if it's just being young and female or it's just being nice." Regardless, principals were quick to note that the flirtatious girl role is not something they wanted to play and hoped that others do not perceive them this way.

As in most elementary schools, principals studied worked with predominately female staffs. When thinking about the role gender plays in relationships with teachers, one principal recalled her experience as one of two assistant principals before becoming a principal herself,

He (the male assistant principal) could just go down the hallway and tell them the same thing that I told them, but it was a very different response. Teachers would do whatever he said without questioning him. I just thought it was pathetic. That's when I realized that most elementary school settings have a staff that is mostly female. And I just think that females respond differently to females than they do males. They are less likely to question or challenge male leaders.

While age and appearance pose some unique circumstances for young principals, being female also has implications pertaining to personal and professional decisions. All participants discussed the role their careers play in their lives outside of school as wives and mothers. Major life decisions, including deciding when to get pregnant, was cited as a decision made based on how well one principal felt her school was running. She said,

I kind of felt like that school was just a great place for me to start a family because it's a small school. Everybody pitches in; there is a lot of teamwork, collaboration, and support, so I felt like I could have a baby there, and things at work would be okay.

While many men and women make decisions about home related to work, this principal went so far as to wait several months before trying to get pregnant so she would not be on maternity leave during End of Grade testing.

Participants noted numerous struggles and benefits pertaining to age and gender. Relationships, credibility, career plans, work ethic, and major life decisions were cited as issues that surface as a result of serving as young, female building administrators. While it is sometimes difficult to discern whether perceptions are a result of age or a result of gender, there is little doubt that these socio-cultural characteristics are influential in the work of these twenty-first century leaders.

Principals are more aware than ever of their responsibilities as models of acceptance and equity. One principal brought up ways in which the language surrounding culture has changed over time. She explained,

I've grown up with a passion for making sure other people and other children don't feel like they are being judged. I try to create an environment that appreciates each unique member. Tolerance, I don't like that word. I want to work in a school not because it tolerates but because it values other people.

Ethnic diversity. The principals interviewed for this study were all Caucasian. In reflecting on their work, including interactions with others, they recognized that they are likely unable to view experiences in the same context as members of other ethnic groups. They are careful to maintain a culture that embraces diversity but realize that, because they are white, it is not always easy to identify racial issues that exist even within the school building. Several principals mentioned wishing their schools were more diverse. One principal discussed a Title I parent survey from the beginning of the year stating, "parents want to see more diversity in our staff--me too," and then noted the difficulties she had experienced in recruiting a diverse staff.

Recognizing the ability of others to embrace all cultures and lifestyles was another priority for these principals. Adams, Pardo, and Schniedewind (1991/1992) describe this priority as

attempting to affect staff and student attitudes, curriculum materials, awareness of cultural diversity, and power relationships so that those personal beliefs and institutional characteristics that have systematically denied some children equal opportunity can be changed. (p. 37)

Specifically, dealing with biases of office staff, especially when they were enrolling new students was a priority. One principal stated that sometimes she had to say, “Be polite to people who don’t look or smell or act like you.” She explained that her new approach is to model appropriate behavior for other staff members and goes out of her way to say things that are not necessarily in her own nature such as, “We’re so excited you’ve come to our school. We have great teachers, and it will be an easy transition for you. What do you need from us?” She hoped that these types of interactions would show her staff how to embrace diversity, even though she knew this was an issue that was not likely to disappear. Principal efforts to educate students and staff members are cited as particularly difficult in schools that are “predominantly white, middle class and Christian” (Adams et al., 1991/1992, p. 37).

Socioeconomic status. In articulating their own beliefs about leadership priorities, principals understood that working with a large population of Economically Disadvantaged students presents a unique challenge for school leaders. Although one principal did not experience this in her work as an assistant principal, she is now working in a school where the majority of students come from poverty-stricken homes. Ensuring that students have the confidence, resources, and relationships that they need to be successful in school stood out as a leadership priority for her.

This participant spent a great deal of time each week implementing a Backpack Program to make sure students have food at home for the weekend. She explained that the program is “done by students’ lunch number for confidentiality, and a local church picks up and fills the backpack [with food] each week.” She described her role in

distributing the backpacks to students to take home on Fridays and identifying new students who may need to participate in the program. Each Monday morning, students drop off the empty backpacks in a bin outside of her office for the process to start again.

Advocating for students in both the home and school setting is a part of principals' daily work. When discussing a first grade girl named Kristin, one principal said she always checks in on her if there has been a long weekend or a break from school. When asked why she does this, she replied, "Because her home's so bad, and you wonder, does she have bruises? Did she get breakfast?" She said that checking in on students is a more important part of informal classroom walkthroughs than anything else she does in the course of her day. Principals recognized the differences in their own home environments and the home environments of many of the students. They admitted there are many students in the school that they worry about during the weekends, and especially during the summer.

I didn't realize all the things that go along with students who come from impoverished homes—the experiences that they don't have, the resources at home that kids don't have, and then, the fact that teachers are coming with real middle class lives to a place where there's not real middle class kids, and trying to talk to teachers candidly about the divide and knowing that showing them a video about Ruby Payne is not going to solve it.

Principals mentioned spending time talking with teachers about inequities in the classroom, especially reviewing trends in discipline data. Two principals discussed concerns that African-American students were being referred for discipline incidents because they were struggling to fit in and were acting out in the classroom as a result. They spoke with teachers about culturally responsive climates but understood that part of

their white cultural lens means that they may have a difficult time realizing when issues are culturally sensitive because they do not experience such marginalization themselves (McIntosh, 1990).

Socio-cultural Considerations

Principals in the twenty-first century are responsible for leading culturally responsive schools during a time in which schools are being asked to do far more in terms of achievement with far less in terms of available resources. Ethnic diversity and socioeconomic status are often cited as especially important socio-cultural factors that impact relationships within the educational environment. Socio-cultural factors influence the work of principals in several ways: (a) socio-cultural considerations related to students, (b) socio-cultural considerations related to staff, and (c) socio-cultural considerations related to principals themselves. All of these factors can impact principals' work as well as the lens through which they see their work.

Responding to students' socio-cultural needs. Cooper (2009) reports, "the United States and its schools are more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse than ever before" (p. 699), meaning that principals must become aware of the needs of all students and families more than ever. With increasing levels of diversity, awareness of equitable, ethical evidence-based practices, effective for helping to close the existing achievement gap, become a necessary part of a principal's work. Principals are ultimately responsible for the instructional practices taking place in their school buildings.

One main concern for participants in this study was how to effectively promote culturally inclusive instructional environments. Carr and Klassen (1997) report,

“Teachers are, undoubtedly, an important factor, and the influence of the lived experiences of predominantly White teachers and administrators working with an increasingly racially diverse student body needs to be understood” (p. 68). Participants, each of whom works at a Title I elementary school, shared concerns regarding middle class teachers working with students from different backgrounds. Their main concern was that there could be a difference in values that hinders teachers from understanding the cultural differences between themselves and the families with whom they work. Without cultural competence, teachers could unintentionally widen the achievement gap that currently exists for specific groups of students.

In addition to instructional needs, students also have other needs related to socio-cultural factors. For example, participants mentioned coordinating programs that assist families with food or other services related to socio-economic status. These principals mentioned the need to respect families’ situations and to maintain confidentiality as much as possible by involving only necessary staff members and ensuring privacy when services are provided.

Responding to staff socio-cultural needs. All of the research subjects discussed the desire to work in more diverse schools with staffs that are representative of the student body. However, as indicated in the research findings, recruiting a diverse staff is a difficult task that none of the five principals feels she has mastered. Harlin (2008) writes,

Since more than 80 percent of teachers in U.S. classrooms are white, middle-class females, there is a critical need to develop teachers’ ability to effectively

understand, support, and teach students who are socioeconomically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. (p. 331)

Findings from the current study indicate participants are aware of the need to develop teachers' understanding of students from diverse backgrounds, but are not always sure of the best way to accomplish this task. Participants did not elaborate on their comfort levels or their strategies for developing culturally inclusive environments. Principals need help understanding staff needs in terms of cultural competence, in order to help teachers become more culturally competent with their students.

Responding to principals' socio-cultural needs. Interestingly, all of the participants in the current study are themselves, white females. Although not an intentional sample, participants own socio-cultural factors may be influencing the way they interpret the socio-cultural needs of students and staff. Interview data collected as part of the current study should be interpreted carefully as the research subjects, although unintended, do not represent a diverse group. It is possible that there are other perspectives that are not included since the sample of participants is homogenous in terms of age, gender, and ethnic diversity. White privilege may indeed play a role in the work of the young principals described in the study, and their work should be interpreted through the lens of white and middle class in addition to young and female.

Themes of Influence, Age, and Gender

The work of twenty-first century principals, specifically for women under the age of 40, is impacted by the context in which they work. There are eight themes that summarize the influences on the work of young, female principals: (a) the importance of

self presentation; (b) the influence of a people-centered leadership style; (c) the ability to multi-task life roles; (d) the absence of intentionality in becoming a principal; (e) the influence of external pressures; (f) the influence of personal schooling experiences; (g) the influence of relationships; and (h) the influence of competitiveness as a motivating factor.

The Importance of Self-Presentation

Research study participants describe creating an intentional impression of professionalism in their daily work. Young female leaders are careful to portray a professional image that reflects confidence. During data collection, participants mentioned the importance of having the right outfit to match their position, carefully avoiding matronly dress while simultaneously steering clear of any image that may be misconstrued as provocative. Participants discussed the need to align their dress with their particular agenda for each day (e.g., suits for board meetings, pants and blouses for PTA meetings, etc.) Inferences can be made surrounding whether young female principals feel obligated to avoid provocative and matronly dress because they are overly concerned about how they will be perceived by others due to their age and gender in their role as principal. Blackmore and Kenway (1993) write, “administration has become associated with a particular type of masculinity—that of the heterosexual, white, rational and technically capable male” (p. 165). Young female school leaders understand the masculinity that is associated with administrative roles and therefore cite image as a key characteristic of their work.

Work ethic, response time, and interactions with others are also methods used by research participants to depict their professionalism and leadership abilities. Working extended hours, immediately responding to all messages, and maintaining a positive attitude in all interactions are part of the image participants see as necessary in their daily work.

The Influence of a People-Centered Leadership Style

Participants described their leadership style as servant-based and linked closely to relationships. Research participants discussed interacting with people socially and asking how their day is as part of building relationships and trust within the workplace. Weyer (2007) concurs, “women leaders tend to employ a leadership style built upon interpersonal relationships and the sharing of power and information, usually associated with transformational leadership” (p. 490). In a society that is embracing educational change, perhaps the transformational tendencies of female leaders, including their abilities to form relationships, are more effective than top-down leadership styles such as that of Ed Bell.

Increased involvement in activities related to instruction is a research finding that indicates principals are more involved in instructional leadership, teaching, and learning than ever before. Participants reported teaching small remediation groups in the weeks prior to the end of grade test and spending time analyzing student data to make informed instructional decisions. Hands-on practices of participants also included daily arrival and dismissal of students, modeling lessons for teachers, and daily reading conferences with students. Participants mentioned the importance of knowing the names of individual

students and parents, in addition to maintaining a working knowledge of the personal lives of teachers in order to be supportive of their lives outside of school. Participants described a leadership style that is more people-centered and focused on the work of students and teachers than the work of Ed Bell in the 1960s, which focused on facilities management and maintaining order within the school building.

The Ability to Multi-task Life Roles

The ability to manage multiple roles is noted in the literature as well as in the research study. Four out of the five principals interviewed are mothers, and all five of the principals are married. Maintaining multiple roles as wife, mother, and principal is evidence of the self-portrayed “ability to multitask,” described by research participants. Luce and Brenner (2006) write, “Professional women who struggle to balance both job and family suffer a penalty in a work world that has changed very little in response to this reality” (pp. 82-83). As indicated in the data, principals cite relying on their husbands to assist with traditional tasks of preparing meals and dropping off children at daycare. Additional findings are that “family nights are few and far between,” due to the workload of the principalship.

BlackBerrys and laptops infringe on vacations, evening, and weekend hours of research participants. However, subjects studied have difficulty imagining their work without technology. While technology increases accessibility to principals and forces them to be transparent in their practices, research participants view technology as a tool that enables them to be more effective in their work in terms of their ability to multitask. Participants also referenced use of paper or online calendars in order to manage multiple

tasks. Making lists and recording all tasks on public calendars enabled teachers, secretaries and even spouses to view participants' calendars in an effort to plan accordingly.

At the early stage of a young, female principal's career, there is a necessity to maintain a certain level of over-achieving perfectionism. Participants acknowledged they would like for there to be a shift from a dichotomous identity of *principal or family member* to include additional identities, such as those that are more focused on the self. All participants were hopeful that eventually work would become secondary to family and self, but anticipated it would be years before that balance could be achieved.

The Absence of Intentionality in Becoming a Principal

A surprising commonality in the data collection is the discovery that none of the study participants ever intended to become a principal. Unintentional career advancement is another finding that may relate to being seen as "overachievers" within the classroom and therefore leading to leadership opportunities. Perhaps unique to the young females in the study, all of the principals interviewed indicate explicitly that they did not set out with the career goal of serving as principals. Circumstances vary for each principal. However, natural leadership tendencies moved them from the classroom to leadership positions, often with very little experience as assistant principals before becoming principals themselves. Examining these facts brings to question why these young females in particular have been recruited for principalships so early in their career. Additional research indicates that accepting such leadership positions too early can have negative implications.

In summary, young principals often lead aggressively. While it cannot be determined that this leadership quality is unique to young leaders or young female leaders, data collected in the study indicates that these principals are young enough to have recently been in the classroom and realize the importance of the need to effectively lead change. Difficulties associated with serving as a young principal include earning credibility and respect from others. Female principals have unique challenges unlike their male counterparts including navigating roles as wife, mother and principal, paying close attention to image, navigating swift and often unanticipated career advancement, and serving as both confidant and supervisor to staff members. Four of the five principals studied were mothers and indicated that their leadership priorities shifted after having children, citing their new focus on the individual child rather than the school as a whole.

The Influence of External Pressures

In addition to the pressures principals place on themselves, there are external pressures associated with the role of principal as well, including the pressure to perform well on accountability measures, to maintain a principal persona, and to juggle competing agendas. The twenty-first century principal is measured as a success or failure, not based on their individual performance evaluations, but on their school's public performance on standardized tests. This pressure to perform well on accountability measures influences the ways in which principals make instructional, personnel, and financial decisions on a regular basis. Furthermore, a principal's persona as a principal must carry over into her personal life, especially regarding public opinion and perception of how she conducts herself outside of the school. For example, many principals interviewed for this study

indicated they consider public perception when deciding which groceries to purchase locally, specifically alcoholic beverages, or where to eat dinner with a friend. Finally, there are also external pressures that result from competing agendas, including educational program reps, central office staff, school board members, and educational researchers. Knowing that decisions regarding whose agenda is followed could impact accountability measures and public persona adds to these external pressures.

The Influence of Personal Schooling Experiences

A principal's personal experiences with schools, in general, typically began at an early age. Depending on how that experience was remembered, either positively or negatively, seemed to impact principals. In general, each principal cited a love of learning from an early age that may or may not have been interrupted at some point in their academic careers by a time in which school was difficult for them. Many discussed ways in which both the positive and the negative experiences influenced their work as principals. One principal cited that her "unstable home environment" made school a safe, orderly place to be even though she moved around a lot so the specific school she attended changed often. "Even though I moved," she remarked, "I just always felt like when I went into the school building, I knew what to expect. So that was always very important to me in some level of stability." It was therefore important to her to provide an expected routine and a sense of stability for students and teachers at her school. Another principal talked about "hating high school" because the public school system "failed to captivate" her as a student. Student engagement, therefore, was one of her top priorities as a principal.

The Influence of Relationships

A principal's relationships with staff also are a unique combination of contemporary characteristics, individual personal experiences, and work characteristics. Relationships with key political figures as a means of marketing a school's work, is an important part of a twenty-first century principal's work. Positive political support can create a flow of resources for a school that otherwise would be difficult to access. For example, school board members' awareness of a specific school-wide project lends itself to public support and the ability to secure materials and funding for the project. In addition, relationships, both political and professional, can help facilitate a principal's upward mobility within a school district. Participating on project teams or committees can help principals establish networks with key figures that can help create personal and professional opportunities, as well as opportunities for the school. On the other hand, relationships with colleagues and political figures, as well as with school staff, can create boundary issues that can create external pressures to adopt an agenda or compromise a principal's persona. Although establishing collaborative relationships is an essential part of the principalship, establishing boundaries within these relationships is also critical.

Other people, sometimes family members or co-workers, seemed to also have an exceptional influence on school principals' work. One principal cited her mother's work with children as a therapist as providing a model for "the giving back part" of her job. Another principal felt that other people in the school system had "pushed" her to do more than "just teach" which prompted her to pursue greater goals than she had imagined for herself.

The Influence of Competitiveness as a Motivating Factor

Another common influence on young, female principals is the competitive nature of their positions. Accountability measures, especially those that compare schools to one another, certainly foster competition between principals. Although these accountability measures only account for one aspect of a principal's performance, because they are common amongst all schools, measures of AYP are a way to compare principals' performance using a common denominator. Young, female principals, because of their perceived inexperience amongst their peers, also tend to compete on a regular basis when completing daily work tasks, such as responding to emails early in the morning or late at night, sitting in the front row at meetings, or submitting documents before other principals. This can also create an imbalance for these principals in terms of personal and professional responsibilities. External pressures and relationships can also unintentionally foster the competitive nature of young, female principals. For example, an assistant superintendent might reinforce the competitive nature of the position by highlighting a young, female's exceptional accountability report in front of other principals, thereby creating an expectation of similar future performance and a standard for which others should achieve.

Data collected in this study indicate that these principals are young enough to have recently been in the classroom and therefore realize the need to effectively lead change. Difficulties associated with serving as a young principal include earning credibility and respect from others. Female principals have unique challenges unlike their male counterparts including navigating roles as wife, mother, and principal, paying close

attention to image, navigating swift and often unanticipated career advancement, and serving as both confidant and supervisor to staff members. This chapter reported results gathered from interviews with five practicing female elementary school principals under the age of forty. Analysis of data reported on the relevance of the influence of context on the work of young, female principals and themes drawn from the findings. The next chapter will discuss conclusions and implications for principals, educational leadership programs, and my personal work.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects the wind to change.
A leader adjusts the sails.
—William Arthur Ward

The purpose of this study was twofold, to understand and richly describe the work of young, female elementary school principals in the early twenty-first century, as well as to examine the influences of context and individual personal experiences on these leaders' principalships. Findings were reported in comparison to previous historical knowledge about the principalship. This chapter will outline the implications of the research findings, as well as provide steps for future research studies.

Since the inception of the principalship, changes regarding principal expectations have impacted priorities of school leaders. Principals are still responsible for numerous daily tasks, for the annual cycle of their work tasks, and managing external and internal pressures; however, the specific responsibilities and pressures have changed over time. Furthermore, because of the emphasis on accountability in twenty-first century public schools, outcomes associated with the work of principals must be evident in measurable terms, while also maintaining the aspects of the role that are not as easily quantifiable.

Work Characteristics of Young Female Principals

The current study depicts the principalship by telling the story of *A Day in the Life and the Annual Cycle of Meredith*, a composite of five young, female principals who

were participants in this study. These richly descriptive accounts present characteristics of the work of young, female principals, including the influences described in the previous chapter, and the competing demands described in the sections that follow. As reported in the daily and annual account of the principalship, the work of young, female elementary school principals in the early twenty-first century is work that is difficult to frame, mainly due to the complexity of the work itself. Although there are components of the principalship that are cyclical in nature, the work of principals is largely unpredictable and consists of numerous events happening simultaneously.

Competing Demands

Study participants indicate struggling with competing agendas within their work, which in turn creates a myriad of roles for principals to manage. Decisions regarding which role is most important at any given time can be challenging. For example, meeting conflicts, school system politics, and value conflicts can sometimes create competing roles.

Role conflict: Being a leader or being a politician? Leadership positions in public institutions often have political agendas attached. Participants reported the necessity to understand political agendas, as well as to intentionally make decisions to engage in or avoid political decision making. Political agendas, especially, exist for principals when decisions regarding student achievement must be made. At times, these decisions belong to the principal, but at other times student achievement decisions are made at the district-level. In terms of the latter, participants report principals must remember that there is an expected degree of complacency from principals, along with

the expectation of exhibiting leadership. Even though principals may not agree with district initiatives, they are expected to comply and implement district initiatives within their own school building and must choose carefully when to voice disagreements with particular decisions. Often, when articulating how competing agendas impact work, participants referred to “upward mobility.” If a principal’s goal is to obtain a higher ranking position, it is important for that principal to consider the implications of political decisions, knowing when to speak up and when to stay quiet. A certain degree of political competence is required of principals since their future careers depend on current supervisor’s and peers’ perceptions of their work.

Value and belief conflicts: Whose version of best practice? All participants interviewed were former teachers and each mentioned the intentional work of aligning practices with beliefs. Principals noted the difficulty and importance of making decisions in the “best interest of students” and valuing instructional practices that are shown to be effective, rather than those that are new or trendy. Results from these decisions often included disagreeing with supervisors, parents, and staff members. Perhaps the most frequently noted source of dispute was related to student achievement and educational programs. Principals mentioned frustration with assessing students repeatedly as districts frequently jumped from one program to another without consulting research or waiting for true measures of success. Participants reported sometimes disagreeing with district-level decisions about educational programs, but feeling powerless to make changes. In addition, these educational programs that come and go also frustrate staff members. Additional conflict was reported to occur when principals attempt to create staff buy-in

for district initiatives, as well as other research-based best practices, often citing that teachers prefer to maintain autonomy when making instructional decisions.

Another value that often caused conflict for participants when attempting to make decisions in the “best interest of students” was that schools should be safe and orderly school environments. Participants recognized this value as non-negotiable, and one that often leads to parent disputes. Requiring photo identification, focusing on positive attendance practices, and protecting instructional time were practices of principals that led to occasional disagreements with parents who were resistant to comply with set routines and procedures that were established in an effort to promote student safety.

Evaluation: Speaking truth or keeping spirits up? Ongoing evaluation is a characteristic of principals’ work that consumes a great deal of time. Participants referred to evaluation of self, teachers, and students as parts of their daily work. When reflecting on their own practices, principals mentioned making sure they lead transparently while maintaining a focus on what is most important while simultaneously pleasing all invested constituents. Principals mentioned using their time commuting to and from work to evaluate and reflect on their own practices, making decisions about how to spend their time and what tasks to take on that day.

Principals are also responsible for evaluating school staff. Evaluation of teachers in terms of morale, performance, and effectiveness was reported as a characteristic of practicing principals’ work. Maintaining positive morale, while holding high expectations for teacher performance, was noted as a time-consuming task for principals, especially when the two seemed to be in conflict with each other. Being a strong leader who is

willing to have difficult conversations while making sure to keep a positive working climate was referred to as a “walking a tightrope” by one participant.

Evaluation of students was also requirement of elementary principals reported by participants in the current study. Principals are ultimately responsible for students’ achievement at school. Student achievement is most often associated with test scores and accountability, but also includes, for example, students who have behavioral issues at school or those who have regular attendance issues.

Principals, therefore, must be aware of all federal, state, and local policies and procedures associated with evaluating performance. Ensuring routines and procedures are in place to evaluate themselves, teachers, and students, was noted by all participants in the research study. It is also important that principals know how to report the results of these evaluation procedures to these groups, as well as other groups of stakeholders.

Meetings: To go or not to go? Participants in this study report that they are expected to attend a variety of meetings during the week, but that attending all of these meetings is an impossible task because of scheduling conflicts; therefore, one of the characteristics of principals’ work is to prioritize meetings. Deciding which meetings to attend can be challenging because there are consequences of attending--but also consequences of not attending. Participants mentioned spending a great deal of time deciding which district-level, off-campus meetings were critical since these types of meetings typically mean less monitoring of teaching and learning.

The Principalship Then and Now

Although similarities exist in the study of young female principals leading in the twenty-first century and the work of Ed Bell as told by Wolcott in the 1960s, influences including educational policies and law, technology, and socio-cultural factors present a set of circumstances unique to the time in which these young female leaders are practicing. The ability to maintain an awareness of research-based best practices while serving as a visionary leader speaks to the need to lead aggressively and with purpose during a time in which public education is facing challenges unlike ever before. Parkay and Hall (1992) state, “The more we learn today from novice principals about how to meet the challenges of beginning leadership, the better off tomorrow’s schools, students, and new principals will be” (p. 3).

Although there appear to be some similarities in the work of principals over time (e.g., instructional leadership, democratic leadership, school-community collaboration), expectations of twenty-first century principals have shifted to also include executive roles similar to those of business leaders. This is evident in the current study in several of the examples cited by participants when describing their typical daily and annual roles. For example, building relationships with all key stakeholders within the educational community is an organizational expectation for building leaders. School is the business of all parties, therefore engaging indirect consumers (e.g., community members and local business leaders), along with direct consumers (e.g., parents, students, and teachers) is the school principals’ organizational responsibility. Participants reported challenges when

building these relationships, but also identified ways in which these types of investments from the local community have helped them do their jobs more effectively.

Understanding and implementing both organizational and instructional leadership is necessary for effective school leadership in the twenty-first century. Principals must serve as visionaries, able to see both sides of these leadership roles in order to effectively manage the daily tasks of the school, while always considering the best ways to impact student achievement and teacher performance. Participants reported the necessity of finding a balance between managing the organizational aspects of schools, and modeling best instructional practices. They report awareness of acting “in the best interest of students” and “leading by example” as ways they attempt to navigate the expectations associated with their work.

In the current study, young female principals practicing in the twenty-first century report refining the ability to manage multiple tasks simultaneously while also acknowledging the difficulty of pleasing all constituents. As Kafka (2009) reports, “principals have always been expected to be instructional leaders, even as the language and buzzwords surrounding instructional tasks have changed, and that their roles have always represented a mixture of expectations and competing demands” (p. 326). The organizational role of principals has not taken the place of instructional leadership, but has been added to the responsibilities of the principals.

Implications

The implications of these research findings can be applied to young, female principals currently working in public school settings, but also to the larger educational

leadership community. Implications, as they apply to aspiring school leaders, the professional community of educational leadership, and to myself in my own work, will be discussed.

Principals

It is clear from these findings that principals struggle to manage all of the roles and responsibilities associated with the organizational and instructional leadership expected of them on a daily and annual basis. It is important for principals to set personal limits in order to find a balance between work and home. For each principal, this balance may look very different, but it is critical that principals find some balance despite the tendency for technology to infiltrate their personal lives with work-related business. A principal's balance between home and work also models for staff the importance of taking care of one's self in order to be a most effective educator for students.

Time seems to be a scarce commodity for principals, but finding ways in which principals can delegate tasks to other individuals or groups could help alleviate some of the scheduling conflicts that arise, helping principals invest in the more holistic workings of the school. Delegation may be difficult for young, female principals, who are especially concerned about wanting to appear competent and in charge at the beginnings of their careers. Relationships between principals and other school community members to whom tasks and responsibilities might be delegated are important to consider, as well as the impact of specific tasks on individual professional roles. For example, it would not be a good idea to delegate discipline issues to a school counselor thereby creating a dual relationship with students or to delegate confidential issues concerning staff to another

staff member. However, examples of tasks and responsibilities that could be delegated include: classroom observations, supervision duties, staff development, planning parent involvement activities, test coordination, and monitoring student attendance.

Principals often do not have the opportunity to talk about their work in schools because they are too busy and work in isolation. Participants in this study verbalized their gratitude for having a chance to talk about their work with someone else who understands the role. A social networking tool for young, female principals could help increase self-reflection as well as decrease feelings of isolation. Furthermore, the relatively short time taken for conducting interviews required for this research led to increased knowledge sharing among participants. For example, participants shared strategies for managing student data, organizing daily tasks, evaluating teacher performance, and creating school-wide schedules. People often share knowledge with others who are similar to themselves—in this case, young, female principals are more likely to share knowledge with other young, female principals (Rogers, 1995). This knowledge sharing and social networking can lead to more support for these beginning principals, which could potentially lead to less burn-out and more effective practices.

A critical implication for young, female principals specifically is the acknowledgement that significant energy is spent by this group on managing others' perceptions of their abilities and leadership skills. Presentation of self is particularly important to this group in terms of dress, work hours, quality of work produced, responsiveness to requests, mood, and stress levels. While they did not express feelings of marginalization when discussing their work, the young, female principals who

participated in this study are hyper-vigilant about avoiding situations that might make them appear as if they are doing a lesser job than others who are older, more experienced, or male. It is easy to see how competition could be unintentionally fostered within this group if support and collaboration are not emphasized within a school system.

Educational Leadership Graduate Programs

Educational leadership programs often focus on specific aspects of the principalship in isolation, never exposing students to the realities of the daily responsibilities that they will face once in a principal position. Principals, therefore, may enter a position under-prepared for the challenges they will face as school leaders. Three especially important practical aspects of the principalship that are critical for preparing twenty-first century educational leaders include legal and political knowledge, technological competence, and socio-cultural awareness. Also important is training principals regarding the roles of other key school staff. A more thorough understanding of key personnel's job descriptions can help principals delegate specific responsibilities effectively. Educational leadership professors are encouraged to incorporate more practical, holistic experiences for principals in training. This study contributes to existing literature and can be used to inform aspiring principals in a practical fashion.

My Personal Work

This study has provided me with the time and space to reflect on my work as a young, female principal while also learning that there are some aspects of the work that are universal to others in my same position. There are five ways, specifically, that the findings of this study have already begun to impact my work as a principal. First, I have

developed a greater intentionality in my daily work life. Second, I have attempted to delegate responsibilities that do not require my attention in order to better prioritize my time. Third, I have paid closer attention to professional relationships' impact on my success as an administrator. Fourth, I have reflected on the lack of emotion expressed by myself and other young, female administrators and continue to wonder if this is a shift that occurs with the role or if the role lends itself to individuals who are more even keeled. Finally, I have developed a much stronger sense of my own cultural identity and how that might be impacting my work in schools. Each of these implications is explored in depth in the following paragraphs.

The intentionality behind my work has certainly increased since beginning this research. The extent to which I impact students, families, teachers, and other colleagues through my daily actions and interactions is much clearer to me. Previously, I had not considered that even the smallest of gestures model my educational philosophy, expectations, or assumptions and were noticed by others. For example, what I choose to wear on a teacher workday sets the tone for others in the building or how I sign an email (Whitney vs. Mrs. Oakley) might send meta-messages I was not aware I was sending. Sometimes I have control over the information that is being conveyed, in which case I have tried harder to be more transparent about the reasons behind certain decisions (i.e., scheduling, delegating, or restructuring); however, other times I have less control over others' perceptions of my decisions. I pay more consideration now, though, to intentionally managing the messages I send. I cannot help but wonder how perceptions may shift further once this dissertation has ended and my title changes from *Mrs.* to *Dr.*

With the shift in title also come decisions about intentionally determining my own next steps. As a young, female principal, I have been challenged thus far to succeed at an accelerated rate. The pace at which I have achieved key milestones cannot be maintained if I choose to work at the same school or at the same school level. In order to continue to fulfill my desire to excel and achieve, it is possible that there is a time limit to which I can remain in one position. On the other hand, it is also interesting to consider that my professional life has maintained a strong presence in my personal life, especially when working full-time and pursuing full-time graduate studies, whereas a transition is about to occur after graduation that could change many aspects of my work as a principal. Regardless, intentional decisions about what I want to be when I grow up and how I see my work interacting with the rest of my life, will inevitably arise in the next few months.

I have also started to pay attention to how I spend my time at work. My job consists of a wide variety of responsibilities including managing personnel, curriculum, instructional practices, building maintenance, and finances. Ultimate responsibility for even the smallest decisions falls on my desk, which has created a working environment in which I attend to almost every detail of building operations. It is impossible, however, to be in twenty places at once, making it necessary to delegate certain tasks to other staff members. Although I still struggle with deciding what can be delegated and what I should maintain under my control, I have developed a better sense of how to prioritize my time. Most importantly, my professional life has always trumped my personal life on the priority list, which is not a pattern I would like to continue. As a result of this research, from self-reflection and interviewing other principals, I am working on developing more

of a willingness to create better boundaries between home and work, leaving work at work when I leave for the day.

One of the greatest lessons gained while writing this dissertation has been coming to terms with my own white privilege and the difficulty I have experienced when trying to understand why I had not previously given this a great deal of thought. In the past, I had defined *racism* as acts of hatred toward a group of people based on the color of their skin. It had not crossed my mind that because of societal norms or unconscious stereotypes, I might be contributing to racism by passively accepting a world where people are treated, or thought of, differently because of their ethnic backgrounds. My self-reflection has led me to my own upbringing and schooling experiences, which provided a foundation for how I see the world. Ultimately, I have reexamined my own core values regarding racism, especially how it impacts my own beliefs about children and educational opportunities.

Future Research

There are several logical next steps for future research in the area of educational leadership as it relates to this study. First, a similar exploration of young, female principals working at middle and high school levels could produce different results and is worthy of investigation. A follow-up study targeting a larger sample could help generalize results of the current study. Second, a study that includes a more diverse sample, including African-American principals and other principals of color, could help fill the research gap left by the current study. Third, it would be interesting to learn what types of support young, female principals receive prior to and after securing principal

positions, while also investigating the types of support these principals would ideally receive at various times throughout their careers, especially focusing on beginning principals. Finally, an investigation of how young, female principals' self-perceptions and presentation of self influence their efficacy as school leaders.

Limitations

As with all research studies, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting results and considering implications. Three primary limitations exist: (a) small sample size, (b) socio-cultural make-up of participants, and (c) all elementary principals. First the primary research method utilized was autoethnography, which focuses on one individual's perceptions of the principalship. Additional interviews were conducted to increase trustworthiness for this methodology through structural corroboration, but the total sample size for the study is still relatively small. Furthermore, participants are affiliated with three school systems within driving distance of the primary researcher. Second, participants were a homogenous group with every principal who participated in the study identifying herself as White or Caucasian. This may skew findings by representing perspectives of only one ethnic group. In collecting and analyzing the individual personal experiences of research participants, it is important to acknowledge that while all female participants may be impacted by issues including motherhood, spouse issues, etc., the personal experiences of these principals are also influenced by their ethnic diversity. This study is only able to reflect the experiences of Caucasian principals and is not intended to reflect the experiences of all

young, female principals. Additionally, all participants worked in elementary school settings.

Capturing the work of these principals requires acknowledging that while their work does not reflect all principals, it is indeed reflective of the characteristics and influences that frame the work of some young female principals practicing in the twenty-first century. Understanding the unique work of principals is knowing that while certain pressures and influences remain constant, one day's work is unlike that of the day preceding or following. Much can be learned from the story of the young female principal practicing in the twenty-first century. Public education is facing unique challenges compared to previous times in history, and understanding the work of these dynamic school leaders may influence changes and policies yet to come.

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APPENDIX A

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Initial Principal Interview Questions

Question 1	Give me some background on your work as a principal.
Question 2	What are your leadership priorities?
Question 3	Talk about any major or critical events that have played a role in your work as a leader.
Question 4	What is the most difficult thing you have had to do thus far in the principalship?
Question 5	Describe personal factors that contribute to your work as a principal.
Question 6	How do twenty-first century practices inform your work?
Question 7	Talk about the role accountability plays in your daily practices.
Question 8	Discuss socio-cultural factors of your school and how this plays a role in your work.
Question 9	Describe educational policies and laws that influence your work as a school leader.
Question 10	Are there any other key factors that we haven't touched on that play a role in your work as a principal?

Second Principal Interview Questions

Question 1	Starting with when you woke up this morning, walk me through your day.
Question 2	Describe interactions you had, including formal and informal.
Question 3	Discuss any meetings and any issues you handled during the course of the day.
Question 4	Talk about emails or messages you addressed during the day.
Question 5	Are there any events or interactions that occurred that we haven't discussed?
Question 6	Describe any critical events that have occurred in recent days that have been more time consuming than others.
Question 7	Based on what you've described from today's events, talk about the impact that being young or being female or both has had on any or all parts.